

CHRISTIANITY

AS OLD AS THE

CREATION:

Proposed by GREGORY T. H. E. Esq.
G O S P E L,

A REPUBLICATION OF THE
RELIGION OF NATURE.

Est autem jus naturale adeo immutabile, ut ne quidem
a Deo mutari potest.

Grot. de Jure Belli & Pacis, l. 1. c. 1. §. 10. 1. 5.
The Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by nature
the things contained in the Law. Rom. ii. 14.

God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation,
he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is ac-
cepted with him. Acts x. 34, 35.

Res ipsa quæ nunc Christiana Religio nuncupatur, erat
& apud Antiquos, nec defuit ab initio generis humani,
quousque ipse Christus veniret in carne, unde vera
Religio quæ jam erat, cepit appellari Christiana.

Aug. Oper. To. 1. p. 17. c. 1. Refratt. l. 1. c. 13.



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Proinde perfectam illam Religionem quae Christi praedicatione nobis tradita est, non novam aut peregrinam, sed si verum dicere oportet, primam, solam, veramque esse liquido apparet.

Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. i. c. 4. Valesius's Transl.

THE TRUE ORIGINAL RELIGION
The Religion of the Gospel, is the true original Religion of Reason and Nature. -- And its Precepts declarative of that original Religion, which was as old as the Creation.

Serm. for prop. the Gosp. in ser. parts, by Dr. Sherlock, now Bp. of Bangor, p. 10. & 13.

God does nothing in the government of the World by mere Will and Arbitrariness. -- The Will of God always determines itself to act according to the eternal Reason of Things. -- All rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves in ALL their actions, by the same eternal Rule of Reason.

Dr. S. Clark's Unchang. Oblig. of Nat. Relig. Edit. 4. pag. 47, 48, 49.

Tindal, Matthew 1653? - 1733

THE
PREFACE.

HE Author of the following sheets, makes no apology for writing on a subject of the last importance, and which, as far as I can find, has no where been so fully treated. He builds nothing on a thing so uncertain as *Tradition*, which differs in most Countries, and of which, in all Countries, the bulk of Mankind are incapable of judging; but thinks he has laid down such plain & evident Rules, as may enable Men of the meanest capacity, to distinguish between *Religion*, & *Superstition*; and has represented the former in every part so beautiful, so amiable, and so strongly affecting, that they, who in the least reflect, must be highly in love with it; and easily perceive, that their Duty & Happiness are inseparable. Whether he has succeeded in this noble, and generous attempt, the Reader will be better able to judge, if he reads with the same freedom, and impartiality, as the Author has written.

THE PREFACE.

THE manner of debating a subject dialogue-wise, (as this between *A. & B.*) was esteem'd by the Ancients the most proper, as well as most prudent way of exposing prevailing absurdities; & Tully's two Discourses, *de Natura Deorum*, & *de Divinatione*, both levell'd against the Superstition of his Country-men, are living monuments of the expediency, and usefulness of this way of writing: And certainly, the Reader may be better entertain'd thus, than by that dry way of Objection & Answer, with which Controversies are usually manag'd.

Care has been taken in this Edition to correct many typographical errors that had escaped in the former. And the pages not being the same in both Editions, I have left, in the Table of the Contents, after the Title of every Chapter, the number of the page of the quarto Edition in a parenthesis, (13) & then added the page of this new Edition; by comparing of which the Reader may easily find in this Edition any passage quoted from the 4to, which otherwise had been difficult & troublesome to find out.



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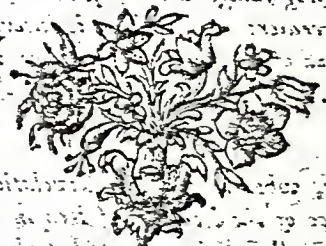
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CHRI.

AS OLD AS THE
CREATION: &c.

That God, at all times, has given Mankind sufficient means of knowing whatever he requires of them; and what those means are.

B. I come to talk with you on a subject, which may perhaps keep me longer with you than you desire.

4. Your uncommodious temper and candor, in debating even the most important points, will always make your conversation agreeable, tho' ever so long; but pray, what is to be the subject of our morning's discourse?

B. I was yesterday in company with a great many Clergy-men, it being our Bishop's primary Visitation; where the Complaint was general; of the coldness & indifference with which people receiv'd the speculative points of Christianity, and all its holy rites; for which formerly they had shewn so great a zeal. This coldness they chiefly imputed to those Low Churchmen, who lay the main stress on Natural Religion; and withal so magnify the doctrine of Sincerity, as in effect to place all Religions on a level, where the Pro-

fessors are alike sincere. The promoters of these notions, as well as the notions themselves, were expos'd with warmth; how justly I will not determine, till we have talk'd the matter over with our usual freedom: For which reason, I have made you this early visit, and wou'd be glad to know the sentiments of so good a Judge, on these two important points; viz. *Sincerity*, and *Natural Religion*.

A. I thank you for this favour, and shall freely tell you, I so little agree with those Gentlemen in relation to sincerity, that I think a sincere examination into religious matters can't be too much press'd; this being the only way to discover true Christianity. The Apostles thought themselves oblig'd, in making Proselytes, to recommend an impartial search; they both desir'd, and requir'd Men to *judge for themselves*, to *prove all things*, &c. this they thought necessary, in order to renounce a Religion, which the force of education had impress'd on their minds; and embrace another directly contrary to the notions, and Prejudices, they had imbib'd. Nay, even those very Men, who most ridicule the doctrine of sincerity, never fail on other occasions to assert, that Infidelity is owing to the want of a sincere examination; and that whoever impartially considers Christianity, must be convinc'd of its truth. And I might add, That cou'd we suppose, a sincere examination wou'd not always produce this effect, yet must it always make Men acceptable to God; since that is all God can require; all that it is in their power to do for the discovery of his will. These, in short, are my sentiments as to this point: and as to the other, I think, too great a stress can't be laid on *Natural Religion*: which, as I take it, differs not from *Reveal'd*, but in the manner of its being communicated: The one being the internal, as the other the external revelation of the same unchangeable will of a Being, who is alike at all times infinitely wise and good.

B. SURELY, Sir, this must be extremely heterodox. Can you believe, that *Natural* and *Reveal'd* Religion differ in nothing, but the manner of their being convey'd to us?

A. As heterodox as I may seem at present, I doubt not, but by asking you a few questions, to let you see, I advance nothing in either of these points without reason; and in order to it, I desire to be inform'd, Whether God has not, from the beginning, given Mankind some Rule, or Law, for their conduct? And whether the observing that did not make 'em acceptable to him?

B. THERE can be no doubt, but the observing such a Law, must have answer'd the end for which it was giv'n; and made Men acceptable to God.

A. WHAT more can any external Revelation do, than render Men acceptable to God? Again,

If God, then, from the beginning, gave Men a Religion; I ask, was that Religion imperfect, or perfect?

B. MOST perfect, without doubt; since no Religion can come from a Being of infinite wisdom and perfection, but what is absolutely perfect.

A. CAN, therefore, a Religion absolutely perfect, admit of any alteration; or be capable of addition, or diminution; & not be as immutable as the Author of it? Can Revelation, I say, add any thing to a Religion thus absolutely perfect, universal, & immutable? Besides, If God has giv'n Mankind a Law, he must have giv'n them likewise sufficient means of knowing it; he wou'd, otherwise, have defeated his own intent in giving it; since a Law, as far as it is unintelligible, ceases to be a Law. Shall we say, that God, who had the forming human understanding, as well as his own Laws, did not know how to adjust the one to the other?

If God, at all times, was willing all Men should come to the knowledge of his truth; cou'd not his infinite

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wisdom and power, at all times, find sufficient means, for making Mankind capable of knowing, what his infinite goodness design'd they shou'd know?

B. I grant you, that God was always willing, that ALL Men shou'd come to the knowledge of true Religion; and we say, that the Christian Religion being the only true, and absolutely perfect Religion, was what God, from the beginning, design'd for all Mankind.

A. IF so, it follows, That the *Christian* Religion has existed from the beginning; and that God, both *then*, and *ever since*, has continu'd to give all Mankind sufficient means to know it; and that 'tis their duty to know, believe, profess, and practise it: so that *Christianity*, tho' the Name is of a later date, must be as old, and as extensive, as humane-nature; and as the Law of our creation, must have been then implanted in us by God himself.

B. IT wou'd be too presuming in us poor Mortals, to pretend to account for the methods Providence takes, in relation to the discovery of its will; and, therefore, a person of less moderation might condemn your questions as captious, presumptuous, & founded in heterodoxy.

A. IF God never intended Mankind shou'd at any time be without Religion, or have false Religions; and there be but one true Religion, which ALL have been ever bound to believe, and profess; I can't see any heterodoxy in affirming, that the means to effect this end of infinite wisdom, must be as universal and extensive as the end itself; or that all Men, at all times, must have had sufficient Means to discover whatever God design'd they shou'd know, & practise: I do not mean by this, that all shou'd have equal knowledge; but that all shou'd have what is sufficient for the circumstances they are in.

B. SINCE you have ask'd me questions, let me, in my turn, demand of you, What are your sentiments

in this matter? Particularly, *What are those Means, which, you suppose, God has, at all times, given the whole race of Mankind, to enable them to discover what he wills them to know, believe, profess, and practise?*

A. I ask'd you those few questions at present, not to determine the point; but only to let you see, you had no reason to be surpris'd at my saying, *Natural and Reveal'd Religion only differ as to the manner of their being communicated.* I shall now readily answer your questions; and, as I think it my duty never to disown my religious sentiments, so I freely declare, that the use of *those faculties*, by which Men are distinguish'd from Brutes, is the only means they have to discern whether there is a God; and whether he concerns himself with human affairs, or has given them any Laws; and what those Laws are. And as Men have no other faculties to judge with; so their using these after the best manner they can, must answer the end for which God gave them, and justify their conduct: For,

If God will judge Mankind as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; the judgment must hold an exact proportion to the use they make of their Reason. And it wou'd be in vain to use it, if the due use of it wou'd not justify them before God; & Men wou'd be in a miserable condition indeed, if whether they us'd it, or not, they shou'd be alike criminal. And if God design'd all Mankind shou'd at all times know, what he wills them to know, believe, profess, and practise; and has giv'n them no other means for this, but the use of Reason; Reason, human Reason, must then be that Means: for, as God has made us rational Creatures, & Reason tells us, that 'tis his Will; that we *ascend* up to the dignity of our natures; so 'tis Reason must tell when we do so. What God requires us to know, believe, profess, and practise, must be in itself a reasonable service; but whether what is offer'd to us is such, or really so, 'tis Reason alone which

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must judge; as the eye is the sole judge of what is visible, the ear of what is audible, so Reason of what is reasonable. If then, Reason was giv'n Men to bring them to the knowledge of God's will, that must be sufficient to produce its intended effect, & can never bring Men to take that for his will, which he design'd, they, by using their Reason, shou'd avoid as contrary to it.

B. IF Men, having done all in their power; all that God requires of 'em to find out his will, shou'd fall into opposite sentiments; must it not be the will of God that it shou'd be so? Can God will such a previous examination, and not will what he foreknows must be the necessary consequence?

A. THERE is, I think, no way to avoid this objection, of God's *willing contrarieties*; but by supposing he requires nothing of Men, but what is founded on the nature of things, & the immutable relations they bear to one another; & what, consequently, they are, as far as concerns 'em, capable of knowing. But this Objection is unanswerable by those, who believe the will of God is not always thus founded; but may contain many merely positive things: since Men may, after having taken all possible care to be in the right, have very opposite sentiments, and be oblig'd, by the Will of God, to hold, and act contrarieties.

B. THO' this subject is attended with the utmost difficulties, yet I find little, or nothing said to solve 'em. I, for my part, know not how to deny Mens being acceptable to God, whatever their opinions may be, after having us'd all the means God has endow'd 'em with for the discovery of his will: and yet I don't know how to admit it. For then, what Religion soever Men are of, if they have duly us'd such means as God ordain'd for the discovery of his will; That, I say, how opposite soever to Christianity, must be the Religion God design'd 'em. And on the other hand, shou'd I own, that the duly using those means wou'd have

have caus'd Men to have been all of one Religion, yet I can't see how that cou'd be the Christian Religion; except it has exist'd from the beginning, and all Men, at all times, have had sufficient means to discover it. For.

If God was always willing, That *All Men should come to the knowledge of his truth*; and there never was a time, when God intended Men shou'd have no Religion; or such an imperfect Religion, which cou'd not answer the end of its being instituted by an infinitely wise Legislator; This seems to my *bewilder'd* Reason to imply, that there was from the beginning but one true Religion, which all Men might know was their duty to embrace; and if this is true, I can't well conceive, how this character can consist with *Christianity*; without allowing it, at the same time, to be *as old as the Creation*. And yet notwithstanding all these seeming difficulties, I am confident the Christian Religion is the only true Religion: but since these difficulties are of your raising, I may, in justice, expect that you shou'd solve 'em.

THIS, I must own, is a difficult point; however, I shall tell you my sentiments; which, I, far from being a *Dogmatizer*, am ready to give up, if you can frame any other *Hypothesis* not liable to the same objections; or others equally strong: tho' I may venture to say, that I take mine to be the only one, which can give any tolerable satisfaction to your present doubts. And therefore, I shall attempt to shew you, That Men, if they sincerely endeavour to discover the will of God, will perceive, that there's a *Law of Nature*, or *Reason*; which is so call'd; as being a Law, which is common, or natural, to all rational Creatures; and that this Law, like its Author, is absolutely perfect, eternal, and unchangeable; and that the design of the Gospel was not to add to, or take from this Law; but to free Men from that load of Superstition, which had been mix'd with it: So that

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TRUE CHRISTIANITY is not a Religion of yesterday, but what God, at the beginning, dictated, & still continues to dictate to Christians, as well as others. If I am so happy as to succeed in this attempt, I hope, not only fully to satisfy your doubts, but greatly to advance the honour of *external* Revelation; by shewing the perfect agreement between *that*, and *internal* Revelation; and by so doing, destroy one of the most successful attempts that has been made on Religion, by setting the Laws of God at variance.

BUT first, I must premise, That in supposing an external Revelation, I take it for granted, that there's sufficient evidence of a Person being sent from God to publish it; nay, I further own, that this divine Person by living up to what he taught, has set us a noble Example; and that as he was highly exalted for so doing, so we, if we use our best endeavours, may expect a suitable reward. This, and every thing of the same nature, I freely own, which is not inconsistent with the Law of God being the same, whether internally, or externally reveal'd.

B. YOUR design, I must own, is highly commendable; but in order to succeed, you are to prove two things. *First*, That the supreme Governor of Mankind has given his Subjects an universal Law, which they, when they come to the use of Reason, are capable of knowing. *Secondly*, That the Divine precepts must be the same, whether internally, or externally reveal'd. If you prove these two points, you will entirely clear up my doubts: but I almost despair of your doing it, since you seem to me to advance a new *Hypothesis*.

A. HEAR the evidence, and then judge; but before I produce it, lest the suppos'd novelty of this opinion may prejudice you, I shall put you in mind of what Archbishop *Laud* says upon a like occasion: „ That when Errors are grown by age and continuance to strength; they who speak for the truth,

„ tho' „ *Laud's Pref. against Fisher.*

„ tho' far older, are ordinarily challeng'd for bringing
 „ in new opinions; and there's no greater absurdity
 „ stirring this day in *Christendom*. „ Now,

„ By putting me to prove that there is a *Law of Na-*
 „ *nure*, you, I suppose, have a mind to hear what I can
 „ say on this subject; since none that believe there's a
 „ God, who governs Mankind, but believe he has given
 „ them a Law for the governing their actions: and that
 „ this is implied in the very notion of governor, & go-
 „ verned; and consequently, that the Law by which he
 „ governs Men, & his government commenc'd together,
 „ and extend alike to all his Subjects. „ * Is it not,

„ as *Bishop Tillotson* observes, a great mistake to think,
 „ that the obligation of moral duties does solely de-
 „ pend upon the revelation of God's will made known
 „ to us in the holy Scriptures; it is plain, Mankind
 „ was always under a Law before God made an ex-
 „ traordinary Revelation; else how cou'd
 „ God judge the World? Or how should they, to
 „ whom the Word of God never came, be acquitted,
 „ or condemned at the last day; for where there is
 „ no Law, there can neither be obedience, nor trans-
 „ gression.

„ If, then, it be absurd to suppose, that Men, tho'
 „ they liv'd ever so impiously and immorally, cou'd do
 „ nothing which God has forbid them; Or if ever so
 „ piously and virtuously, cou'd not do any thing God
 „ has commanded them, must there not always have
 „ been an universal Law so fully promulgated to Man-
 „ kind, that they could have no just plea from their
 „ ignorance not to be try'd by it; and consequently,
 „ nothing less than its being founded on the nature of
 „ things, & the relation they stand in to God, & to one
 „ another, visible at all times to all Mankind, cou'd make
 „ it thus universally promulgated. But further to illu-
 „ strate this matter, can it be imagin'd, that if God has
 „ been so good to all other Animals, as to give them,

„ A 5. not
 „ * Pref. to *Wilkins of Nat. Relig.*

not in one country only, but in all places whatsoever, sufficient means to act for their own preservation, that he has had less kindness for the immortal souls of those made after his own image, and has not given them at one time as well as another, and at one place as well as another, sufficient means to provide for their eternal happiness? Or,

CAN it be suppos'd, an infinitely good & gracious Being, which gives Men notice by their senses, what does good or hurt to their bodies, has had less regard for their immortal parts; and has not given them at all times by the light of their understanding, sufficient means to discover what makes for the good of their Souls; but has necessitated them, or any of them, to continue from age to age in destructive ignorance, or error? To press this matter further, let me ask you, Whether there's not a clear and distinct light, that enlightens all Men; and which, the moment they attend to it, makes them perceive those eternal truths which are the foundation of all our knowledge? And is it not God himself, who immediately illuminates them? And what better reason can you assign, why infinite Wisdom shou'd act thus, except it be to give Mankind standing Rules to distinguish Truth from Falseness; especially in matters of the highest consequence, to their eternal as well as temporal happiness?

THERE has, no doubt, been a great number of traditional Religions succeeding one another; and as far as we know, there is no traditional Religion, which, except in name, has continu'd the same for any long time: and tho' there are a great number of Sects, who go under the same common denomination, yet they are almost as much divided among themselves, as if they own'd different Religions, and accordingly charge one another with erring fundamentally. Yet all these agree in acknowledging a *Law of Nature*, and that they are indispensably oblig'd to obey its dictates: So that this *Light of Nature*, like that of the Sun,

Sun, is universal; and wou'd, did not Men shut the eyes of their understanding, or suffer others to blind them, soon disperse all these mists & fogs, which arise from false traditions, or false interpretations of the true tradition.

C H A P. II.

That the Religion of Nature consists in observing these things, which our Reason, by considering the nature of God and Man, and the relation we stand in to him & to one another, demonstrates to be our duty; and that those things are plain; and likewise what they are.

B. **T**HAT we may the better know whether the Law or Religion of Nature is universal & the Gospel a republication of it, & not a new Religion, I desire you will give a definition of the Religion of Nature.

*A. By Natural Religion, I understand the belief of the existence of a God, and the sense and practice of those duties, which result from the knowledge, we, by our Reason, have of him, and his perfections; and of ourselves, and our own imperfections; and of the relation we stand in to him, and to our fellow-creatures; so that the Religion of Nature takes in every thing that is founded on the reason & nature of things. Hence Grotius defines the Law of Nature to be * *Dictum recte rationis, indicans actum alicui, ex ejus convenientia aut disconvenientia cum ipsa natura rationali, inesse moralem turpitudinem, aut necessitatem moralem, ac consequenter ab auctore natura Deo talem actum aut vetari aut precipi.**

I suppose you will allow, that 'tis evident by the Light of Nature that there is a God; or in other words,

* Lib. I. c. I. Par. 10.

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a Being absolutely perfect, & infinitely happy in himself; who is the source of all other beings; and that what perfections soever the creatures have, they are wholly deriv'd from him.

B. THIS, no doubt, has been demonstrated over & over; and I must own, that I can't be more certain of my own Existence; than of the Existence of such a Being.

A. SINCE then, it is demonstrable there is such a Being, it is equally demonstrable, that the Creatures can neither add to, or take from the happiness of that Being; and that he cou'd have no motive in framing his Creatures, or in giving Laws to such of them as he made capable of knowing his will, but their own good.

To imagine he created them at first for his own sake, and has since requir'd things of them for that reason, is to suppose he was not perfectly happy in himself before the Creation; and that the Creatures, by either observing, or not observing the Rules prescrib'd them, cou'd add to, or take from his happiness.

If then, a Being infinitely happy in himself, cou'd not command his Creatures any thing for his own good; nor an All-wise Being things to no end or purpose; nor an All-good Being any thing but for their good; it unavoidably follows, nothing can be a part of the divine Law, but what tends to promote the common interest, and mutual happiness of his rational Creatures; & every thing that does so must be a part of it.

As God can require nothing of us, but what makes for our happiness; so he, who can't envy us any happiness our nature is capable of, can forbid us those things only, which tend to our hurt; and this we are as certain of, as that there is a God infinitely happy in himself, infinitely good and wise: and as God can design nothing by his Laws but our good, so by being infinitely powerful, he can bring every thing to pass which he designs for that end.

FROM the consideration of these perfections, we cannot but have the highest veneration, nay the greatest adoration and love for this supreme Being; who, that we may not fail to be as happy as possible for such Creatures to be, has made our acting for our *present*, to be the only means of obtaining our *future* happiness; & that we can't sin against him, but by acting against our reasonable natures: These reflections, which occur to every one who in the least considers, must give us a wonderful and surprizing sense of the divine Goodness, fill us with admiration, transport & extacy (of which we daily see among contemplative persons remarkable instances) and not only force us to express a never-failing gratitude in raptures of the highest praise and thanksgiving; but make us strive to imitate him in our extensive love to our Fellow-Creatures. And thus copying after the Divine original, & taking God himself for our precedent, must make us like unto him, who is all perfection & all happiness; and who must have an inexhaustible love for all, who thus endeavour to imitate him.

THE difference between the supreme Being, infinitely happy in himself, and the Creatures who are not so, is, that all his actions, in relation to his Creatures, flow from a pure disinterested Love; whereas the spring of all the actions of the Creatures is their own good: * *We love God, because he first lov'd us*; & consequently, our Love to him will be in proportion to our sense of his goodness to us. And therefore, we can't in the least vary from those sentiments, which the consideration of the divine attributes implant in us; but we must in proportion take off from the goodness of God, and those motives we have to love him as we ought.

OUR Reason, which gives us a demonstration of the Divine perfections, affords us the same concerning the nature of those duties God requires; not only

with

* 1. John 4. 19.

with relation to himself, but to ourselves, & one another: Those we shall discern, if we look into ourselves, and consider our own natures, & those circumstances God has plac'd us in with relation to our Fellow-Creatures; & see what conduces to our mutual happiness: Of this, our senses, our reason, the experience of others as well as our own, can't fail to give us sufficient information.

WITH relation to ourselves, we can't but know how we are to act; if we consider, that God has endow'd Man with such a nature, as makes him necessarily desire his own good; and, therefore, he may be sure, that God, who has bestow'd this nature on him, cou'd not require any thing of him in prejudice of it; but on the contrary, that he shou'd do every thing which tends to promote the good of it. The health of the body, and the vigor of the mind being highly conducing to our good, we must be sensible we offend our Maker, if we indulge our senses to the prejudice of these: And because not only all irregular passions, all unfriendly affections carry their own torment with them, and endless inconveniences attend the excess of sensual delights; & all immoderate desires (human nature being able to bear but a certain proportion) disorder both mind and body; we can't but know we ought to use great moderation with relation to our passions, or in other words, govern all our actions by reason; that, and our true interest being inseparable. And in a word, whoever so regulates his natural appetites, as will conduce most to the exercise of his reason, the health of his body, & the pleasure of his senses, taken & consider'd together, (since herein his happiness consists) may be certain he can never offend his Maker; Who, as he governs all things according to their natures, can't but expect his rational Creatures shou'd act according to their natures.

As to what God expects from Man with relation to each other; every one must know his duty, who

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considers that the common Parent of Mankind has the whole Species alike under his protection, and will equally punish one man for injuring others, as he would others for injuring him; and consequently, that it is his duty to deal with them, as he expects they should deal with him in the like circumstances. How much this is his duty every one must perceive, who considers himself as a weak creature, not able to subsist without the assistance of others, who have it in their power to retaliate the usage he gives them: And that he may expect, if he breaks those rules which are necessary for Mens mutual happiness, to be treated like a common enemy, not only by the persons injur'd, but by all others; who, by the common ties of Nature, are oblig'd to defend, & assist each other. And not only a Man's own particular interest, but that of his children, his family, and all that's dear to him, obliges him to promote the common happiness, & to endeavour to convey the same to posterity.

ALL Moralists agree, that human Nature is so constituted, that Men can't live without society & mutual assistance; & that God has endow'd them with reason, speech, and other faculties, evidently fitted to enable them to assist each other in all matters of life; That, therefore, 'tis the will of God who gives them this nature, & endows them with these faculties, that they should employ them for their common benefit and mutual assistance. And the *Philosophers*, who saw that all society would be dissolv'd, and Men soon become destitute of even the necessities of life, and be a prey to one another, if each Man was only to mind himself, and his own single interest; and that every thing pointed out the necessity of mutual benevolence among Mankind; and therefore they judg'd, that men by their nature were fram'd to be useful to one another; *Ad quendos conservandosq; homines hominem natum esse*, says *Cicero* *. And therefore, every Man, for the sake

of

* De fin. l. 3.

of others as well as himself, is not to disable his body or mind by such irregularities, as may make him less serviceable to them.

In short, considering the variety of circumstances Men are under, & these continually changing, as well as being for the most part unforeseen; 'tis impossible to have Rules laid down by any *external* Revelation for every particular case; & therefore, there must be some standing rule, discoverable by the *Light of Nature*, to direct us in all such cases. And we can't be more certain that 'tis the will of God, that those effects which flow from natural causes should so flow, than we are that 'tis the will of God, that Men should observe whatever the nature of things, and the relation they have to one another make fit to be observ'd, should be so observ'd; Or in other words, we can't but know, if we in the least consider, that whatever circumstances Men are plac'd in, by the universal Cause of all things; that 'tis his eternal & immutable Will, by his placing them in these circumstances, that they act as these require. 'Tis absurd to imagine we are oblig'd to act thus in some cases, & not in others; when the Reason for acting thus in all is the same. This consideration alone will direct a Man how to act in all conditions of life, whether *Father, Son, Husband, Servant, Subject, Master, King, &c.* Thus we see how the reason of things, or the relation they have to each other, teaches us our duty in all cases whatever. And I may add, that the better to cause Men to observe those rules, which make for their mutual benefit, infinite Goodness has sown in their hearts seeds of pity, humanity and tenderness, which, without much difficulty, cannot be eradicated; but nothing operates more strongly than that desire Men have of being in esteem, credit, and reputation with their fellow Creatures; not to be obtain'd without acting on the Principles of natural Justice, Equity, Benevolence, &c.

IN a word, As a most beneficent disposition in the Supreme Being is the source of all his actions in relation to his Creatures, so he has implanted in Man, whom he has made after his own image, a love for his species; the gratifying of which in doing acts of benevolence, compassion and good will, produces a pleasure that never fatigues: as on the contrary, actions of ill-nature, envy, malice, &c. never fail to produce shame, confusion, and everlasting self-reproach.

AND now let any one say, how 'tis possible God could more fully make known his will to all intelligent Creatures, than by making every thing within and without them a declaration of it, & an argument for observing it.

HAVING thus discover'd our duty, we may be sure it will always be the same; since inconstancy, as it argues a defect either of wisdom or power, can't belong to a Being infinitely wise and powerful. What unerring Wisdom has once instituted can have no defects; and as God is entirely free from all partiality, his Laws must alike extend to all times & places.

FROM these premises, I think, we may boldly draw this conclusion, That if Religion consists in the practice of those duties, that result from the relation we stand in to God and Man, our Religion must always be the same. If God is unchangeable, our duty to him must be so too. If human nature continues the same, and Men at all times stand in the same relation to one another, the duties which result from those relations must always be the same: And consequently, our duty to God & Man must, from the beginning of the world to the end, always be the same, always alike plain & perspicuous, & can neither be chang'd in whole or part; which demonstrates that no person, if he comes from God, can teach us any other Religion, or give us any precepts, but what are founded on those relations. *Heaven & Earth shall sooner pass away, than one Tittle of this Eternal Law shall either be abrogated, or alter'd.*

To sum up all in few words, As Nature teaches Men to unite for their mutual defence, and Government was instituted solely for this end; so to make this more effectual, Religion, which reaches the thoughts, was wholly ordain'd: it being impossible for God, in governing the World, to propose to himself any other end than the good of the governed; and consequently, whoever acts what is best for himself both in a publick, and private capacity, does all that either God or Man can require. Thus from the consideration of our own imperfections, which we continually feel, and the perfections of our Creator, which we constantly view in all his works, we may arrive to the knowledge of our duty, both to our Creator & Fellow-Creatures. Hence I think, we may define true Religion to consist in a constant disposition of mind to do all the good we can, & thereby render ourselves acceptable to God in answering the end of his creation.

C H A P. III.

That the Perfection and Happiness of all rational Beings, supreme as well as subordinate, consists in living up to the Dictates of their Nature.

TO make this, (since all our happiness depends on it) if possible, more plain; The Principle from which all human actions flow is the desire of happiness; & God, who does nothing in vain, would in vain have implanted this principle, this only innate principle in Mankind, if he had not given them Reason to discern what actions make for, and what against their happiness.

B. WHEREIN do you take the happiness of rational Creatures to consist? Without knowing that, this controversy can't be determin'd; and when 'tis known, our dispute must soon be ended.

A. THE Happiness of all beings whatever consists in the perfection of their nature; and the nature of a rational being is most perfect, when it is perfectly rational; that is, when it governs all its actions by the rules of right Reason; for then it arrives to the most perfect, and consequently the happiest state a rational nature can aspire to: and every deviation from the rules of right reason being an imperfection, must carry with it a proportionable unhappiness: & a Man's happiness and duty must consist in the same things, since no one can be oblig'd to do any thing that does not some way or other contribute to his happiness; and consequently according to the sense Men have of their own happiness, and of the means which will naturally procure it, they will assuredly attain the knowledge of their respective duties.

B. If we know wherein the happiness of God, who is necessarily happy, consists, we might judge wherein consists the happiness of Man made after God's own image; and whether happiness, or misery are the necessary consequence of his Actions.

A. Because this is a point of the highest consequence, I shall speak my sentiments (that they may the better pass with you) in the words of the judicious Dr. Scot; who says, * „ That which renders God so infinitely „ happy in himself, is not so much the Almighty „ power he has to defend himself from foreign hurts „ & injuries, as the exact agreement of all his actions „ with the All-comprehending Reason of his own „ mind. God loves not himself merely because he is „ himself, but because he is in all respects morally good, „ and his Will and Power perfectly compliant with „ the infallible dictates of his own Reason: Hence „ arises his infinite complacency in himself, that there's „ nothing in him but what his own Reason perfectly „ approves; no inclinations in his will, or nature,

* *Christ. Life Part. 2. Vol. I. Ch. I.*

„but what are exactly agreeable to the fairest ideas
„of his own mind.

If the perfection, & consequently the happiness of
God, consists in the purity & rectitude of his Nature;
we, as far as we can arrive to a like purity and recti-
tude, must be so far necessarily happy; since by living
according to the rules of right Reason, we more and
more implant in us the moral perfections of God,
from which his happiness is inseparable. We then,
it I may so say, *live the life of God*; that is, we, in our
place and station, live after the same manner, and by
the same rules as he does in his; & we do what God
himself would do was he in our place; & there would
be no other difference between his life and ours, but
what arises from our different states and relations;
since the same rules would determine our wills as de-
termine his will; and by our repeated acts of virtue,
we should be continually making nearer and nearer
approaches to the most perfect, and the most happy
Being. By this conduct, we, as the Scriptures assure us,
should be made partakers of the *Divine nature, be born
of God, and be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect*;
& can that be without being as happy as we are per-
fect? Hence we may contemplate the great dignity
of our *Rational* nature, since our Reason for kind;
tho' not for degree, is of the same nature with that
of God; nay, 'tis our Reason which makes us the
image of God himself, & is the common bond which
unites Heaven & Earth; the Creatures, & the Creator;
and if our happiness is limited, 'tis because our Reason
is so: 'Tis God alone, who has an unlimited Reason
and Happiness.

THE excellent Author just now mention'd says,
„* The best thing we can receive from God is him-
„self, and himself we do receive in our strict com-
„pliance with the eternal Laws of goodness; which
„Laws being transcrib'd from the nature of God,
„from

* *Christ. Life. Part 2. Vol. 1. Ch. 1.*

„ from his eternal righteousness & goodness, we do,
 „ by obeying them, derive God's nature into our own;
 „ so that while we write after the copy of his Laws,
 „ we write out the perfections of his being: and his
 „ Laws being the seal on which he has engraven his
 „ nature, we, in obeying them, take impression from
 „ them, and stamp his blessed nature on our own. „
 Which, certainly, must make us necessarily happy,
 as a contrary conduct wou'd make us unhappy. And,
 I think, I may venture to say, that cou'd we suppose
 God himself to act otherwise, he wou'd then be as
 unhappy as he now is happy; and his omnipotency
 cou'd not hinder him from being continually expos'd
 to the reproach of his own infallible Reason:

From these premises, I think, we may conclude,
 that Men, according as they do, or do not partake of
 the nature of God, must unavoidably be either happy,
 or miserable. And herein appears the great wisdom of
 God, in making Mens misery and happiness the ne-
 cessary and inseparable consequence of their actions:
 and that rational actions carry with them their own
 Reward, and irrational their own punishment. This,
 I think, can't be deny'd, as long as there are some
 actions naturally beneficial to us, & others as hurtful:
 and that there's no virtue, but what has some good
 inseparably annex'd to it; and no vice, but what as
 necessarily carries with it some evil; and if our ra-
 tional nature is to be the same in the next life, as it
 is in this, our actions must produce effects of the same
 kind, and that too in a much higher degree.

In this life, 'tis true, we can't be perfectly happy;
 as subject to diseases and disasters. We are imperfect
 ourselves, and have none to converse with but im-
 perfect Creatures: and yet if we act according to the
 dictates of right Reason, we shall receive, even here,
 true inward comfort and satisfaction, and hereafter,
 when we are freed from those imperfections, com-
 plete happiness. On the contrary, the Man who aban-

CHRISTIANITY AS OLD

sons his Reason; besides the misery of all sorts an irrational conduct will bring on him, must feel in his mind, pain, and anguish even in this life, and in the life to come, when there are no sensual things to divert his thoughts, insupportable grief and misery.

THE human Law-givers are forc'd to have recourse to punishments, which are not connected with the things they forbid, yet a Being of infinite power is not thus straiten'd, but may make one the necessary consequence of the other. And, indeed, how can it be otherwise, since good and evil have their foundation in the essential difference of things, and their nature is fix'd and immoveable: And consequently, our happiness depends on the intrinsic nature of the one, & our misery on the intrinsic nature of the other.

As God, whose infinite wisdom sets him above being deceiv'd, or influenc'd by any wrong affections, acts in constant conformity to the reason and nature of things: and 'tis a contradiction to his nature for him to do any thing that is not fit & reasonable: so he would have fram'd our nature in contradiction to his own, if he had oblig'd us to act otherwise. No, God can never give us commands repugnant to his own nature, or require us to do what he himself abhors to do. The end for which God has given us Reason, is to compare things, and the relation they stand in to each other, & from thence to judge of the fitness and unfitness of actions: and cou'd not our Reason judge soundly in all such matters, it cou'd not have answer'd the end for which infinite Wisdom & Goodness bestow'd that excellent gift, and for which we can't enough adore the goodness of God.

HAD God, from time to time, spoke to all Mankind in their several languages, and his words had miraculously convey'd the same ideas to all persons, yet he cou'd not speak more plainly than he has done by the things themselves, & the relation which Reason shews there is between them. Nay, since 'tis impossible in any

any book, or books, that a particular rule cou'd be giv'n for every case, we must even then have had recourse to the light of Nature to teach us our duty in most cases: especially considering the numberless circumstances which attend us, and which, perpetually varying, may make the same actions, according as Men are differently affected by them, either good or bad. And I may add, that most of the particular rules laid down in the Gospel for our direction, are spoken after such a figurative manner, that except we judge of their meaning, not merely by the letter, but by what the Law of Nature antecedently declares to be our duty, they are apt to lead us wrong. And if precepts relating to morality, are deliver'd after an obscure manner, when they might have been deliver'd otherwise, what reason can you assign for its being so, but that infinite Wisdom meant to refer us to that Law for the explaining them. Sufficient instances of this nature I shall give you hereafter, tho' I must own, I can't carry this point so far as a learned Divine, who represents the Scriptures more obscure (which one wou'd think impossible) than even the *Fathers*. He tells us, „ That a „ certain Author (viz. *Flaccus Illyricus*)* has furnish'd „ us with one and fifty reasons for the obscurity of „ the Scriptures; adding, „ I think, I may truly say „ that the Writings of the Prophets & Apostles abound „ with tropes and metaphors, types and allegories, „ parables and dark speeches, and are as much, nay, „ much more unintelligible in many places, than the „ Writings of the Ancients. „ 'Tis well, this Author, † who talks of People being stark *Bible-mad*, stopp'd here, and did not with a celebrated Wit ‡ cry, *The truly illuminated Books are the darkest of all.*

See Pref. to Reeve's Apol. &c. p. 45, 46.

† Pref. concern. right Use of the Fathers. pag. 11.

‡ Tale of a Tub.

THE Writer above-mention'd supposes it impossible, that God's will shou'd be fully reveal'd by Books; „ Except, *says he*, * it might be said perhaps without „ a Figure, that even the World itself could not contain the Books which should be written: „ But with submission to this reverend person, I can't help thinking, but that; (such is the divine goodness) God's Will is so clearly, & fully manifested in the Book of Nature, that he who runs may read it.

THIS can't be deny'd, if the Book of Nature shews us in characters legible by the whole world, the relation we stand in to God & our fellow-creatures, and the duties resulting from thence: for then it must teach us the whole of our duty, since it would be unjust and tyrannical in any Being, to require more of others than the relation they stand in to him makes it their duty to pay, it being that relation alone which gives him his just power and authority. We are engag'd with many artificial Relations, such as Governor and governed, Master and Servant, Husband and Wife, &c. and the end of these relations teaches us what they require: and they being enter'd into for the sake of each others assistance, either party is injur'd by the others not observing what these Relations demand, or by exacting more than the end of entering into them requires.

THO' the relation we stand in to God, is not artificial, as most are amongst Men, who want each others assistance, but is natural at least on our part; yet this does not hinder, but that we may know by Reason the end he had in being related to us as Creator and Governor, and what he requires of his Creatures and Subjects. This the divine nature which contains in itself all perfection, and all happiness, plainly points out to us. And if we are once certain of the end of God's entering into this relation with Man, we may be as certain from his wisdom and goodness, and all his

Divine

Divine perfections; that he will require no more of us than the end he had in entering into this Relation requires.

Is it would be unjust and tyrannical in an earthly Governor, to exact things of his Subjects, that do not contribute to the end for which this relation between them was enter'd into; can we suppose a Governor of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, who has always in his mind the end for which he governs Mankind, will act the Tyrant, and put them under severe Penalties for not observing such things as have no relation to the end for which he created, & governs them?

THERE'S no Relation among Men without a mutual obligation arising from it. Parents owe a duty to Children as well as Children to Parents: but are not we, in a stricter sense, the Children of God, and Parents only instruments in his hands? since 'tis God, who from nothing brings us into being, frames us after the manner that best pleases him, imprints on us what faculties, inclinations, desires and passions he thinks fit: And is not God from his innate Goodness & Equity, under an obligation to treat us more kindly than earthly Parents do their best-beloved Children; who beget them without designing it? Whereas God, whose actions are govern'd by infinite Goodness, could have no motive to bring us into being (which of itself is no blessing) but our good, and for the same reason preserves us in being: nor can so kind & tender a Parent play the Tyrant, & impose commands on us, which do not flow from the Relations we stand in to him, and to one another.

If we consider what our Reason will inform us, of the nature of our great Creator and Governor, we can't fail of knowing our duty: for as Dr. Scott justly observes, * If you will serve the great King of the World in such ways as are pleasing and acceptable to him, you must study his nature, & inform yourselves,

* *Christ. Life Part 2. Vol. I. Chap. 6. p. 321, 322.*

„ selves, which way his infinite perfections incline,
 „ that you may know how to comport yourselves
 „ towards him, and to render him such services as are
 „ agreeable to his nature: for there's no rule in the
 „ world, but only that of his nature, by which you
 „ can certainly conclude what will please him. ---

„ So that in all our enquiries what is pleasing to God,
 „ our last appeal must be to his nature, which is the
 „ great standard of Good & Evil, by which we are
 „ to measure what is pleasing & displeasing to him. „

IF, then, with this judicious Author, you allow,
 that we are to measure what is pleasing & displeasing
 to God, (which takes in the whole of Religion)
 from what our Reason teaches concerning his Nature,
 you allow all I contend for.

IN short, if the relations between things, and the
 fitness resulting from thence, be not the sole rule of
 God's actions, must not God be an arbitrary Being?
 and then what a miserable condition will Mankind
 be in! Since an arbitrary Will might change every
 moment, & those things which entitl'd Men to God's
 favour to-day, might make them incur his displeasure
 to-morrow: Nay, he might at the same time have a
 secret Will opposite to his reveal'd Will: or have dif-
 ferent Wills for every different person: or might re-
 veal his arbitrary commands so obscurely, as to cause
 the utmost confusion. But if God only commands
 what the nature of things shews to be fit, 'tis scarce
 possible, that Men (tho' now endlessly divided upon the
 account of their different traditions) should mistake
 their duty: since a mind that's attentive can as easily
 distinguish *fit* from *unfit*, as the eye can beauty from
 deformity, or the ear harmony from discord: and if
 no commands can alter the nature of things, or make
 that *fit* which is in itself *unfit*, external Revelation must
 attend the nature and relation of things, and can only
 speak what those speak. As for instance, 'tis not in
 our power, tho' ever so often commanded, to love the

the Deity, while we conceive him an arbitrary Being acting out of humour and caprice: nor could any commands, supposing such possible, oblige us not to love him, while we believe him a kind & beneficent Being: so that as long as we have right notions of God, we can't but love, & adore him as we ought.

Thus, I think, I have fully prov'd from the nature of God and Man, and the Relations we stand in to him & one another, that the Divine precepts can't vary: & that these Relations which are the permanent voice of God, by which he speaks to all Mankind, do, at all times, infallibly point out to us our duty in all the various circumstances of life.

Should Revelation require less than those Relations require, would it not be an imperfect rule? And if it enjoins more, would it not argue the Author of it to be of a tyrannical nature, imposing on his Subjects, and under most severe penalties, unnecessary things: and likewise shew a design, not of being belov'd, but hated and dreaded? And therefore, those who see the consequences of things, describe the Christian Religion as requiring such things only, as considering the Relations we stand in to God and one another, are apparently for our good.

The most accurate Dr. Barrow gives this character of the Christian Religion; * That its Precepts are no other than such as Physicians prescribe for the health of our bodies: as Politicians would allow to be needful for the peace of the State: as Epicurean Philosophers recommend for the tranquility of our minds, and pleasures of our lives: such as Reason dictates, and daily shews conducive to our welfare in all respects: which consequently, were there no Law enacting them, we should in wisdom choose to observe, and voluntarily impose them on ourselves, confessing them to be fir matters of Law, as most advantageous and requisite to the good, general & particular, of Mankind.

THAT

* Vol. of Serms. pag. 82.

THAT great and good Man Dr. Tillotson says, *
 „ That All the Precepts of Christianity are reasonable
 „ & wise, requiring such duties as are suitable to the
 „ light of nature, and do approve themselves to the
 „ best reason of Mankind: such as have their founda-
 „ tion in the nature of God, and are an imitation
 „ of the divine excellencies: such as tend to the per-
 „ fection of human-nature, & to raise the minds of
 „ Men to the highest pitch of goodness & virtue. ---
 „ They command nothing that's unnecessary, they
 „ omit nothing that may tend to the glory of God,
 „ or the welfare of Men, nor do they restrain us in
 „ any thing, but what is contrary to the regular in-
 „ clinations of Nature, or to our Reason, & true in-
 „ terest: they forbid us nothing but what is base and
 „ unworthy to serve our humours and passions, to
 „ make ourselves fools and beasts. --- In a word,
 „ nothing but what tends to our private harm, or
 „ prejudice, or to publick disorder & confusion. „
 The late Dean of *Canterbury*, in a Sermon preach'd
 in defence of Christianity, says, †, „ What can be a
 „ more powerful incentive to obedience, than for a
 „ rational Creature clearly to discern the equity, the
 „ necessity, the benefit, the decency and beauty of
 „ every action he is call'd to do, and thence to be
 „ duly sensible how gracious a Master he serves: One
 „ that is so far from loading him with fruitless, arbi-
 „ trary, & tyrannical impositions, that each command
 „ abstracted from his command who issues it, is able
 „ to recommend itself, & nothing requir'd but what
 „ every wise Man wou'd choose of his own accord,
 „ and cannot, without being his own enemy, wish
 „ to be exempted from. „ And this character of
 Christianity he makes to be essential to its being from
 God, & therefore, must make it the same with Natural
 Religion, which has this character impress'd on it.

* *Serm. Vol. i. pag. 86.*

† *Boyle's Lect. pag. 26.*

THERE was none of the Doctrines of our Saviour (*says the late Archbishop of York **) calculated for the gratification of Mens idle curiosities, the busying and amusing them with airy & useless speculations: much less were they intended for an exercise of our credulity, or a trial how far we could bring our Reason to submit to our Faith. But as on the one hand they were plain & simple, and such as by their agreeableness to the rational faculties of Mankind, did highly recommend themselves to our belief, so on the other hand they had an immediate relation to practice, and were the genuine principles and foundation, upon which all human & divine virtues were naturally to be superstructed. Does not every one see, that if the Religion of Nature had been put instead of Christianity, these descriptions would have exactly agreed with it. The judicious Dr. *Scot* affirms, †, God never imposes Laws on us *pro Imperio*, as arbitrary tests and trials of our obedience. -- The great design of them, *says he*, is to do us good, and direct our actions to our own interest. --- This, if we firmly believe, will infinitely encourage our obedience: for when I am sure God commands me nothing but what my own health, ease, and happiness requires, and that every Law of his is both a necessary and sovereign prescription against the diseases of my nature, and he could not prescribe less than he has, without being defective in his care of my recovery & happiness, with what prudence & modesty can I grudge to obey him? NOW, the most considerable Men, even among the *Papists*, do not scruple to maintain there's nothing in Religion but what is moral. The Divines of *Port-Royal*

for

* Sermon before the Queen on *Christm. Day*, 1724.

† *Christ. Life Part 2. Vol. 1. Ch. 4. p. 173, 174.*

for instance say...*, All the Precepts, & all the My-
 steries that are express'd in so many different ways,
 in the holy volumes, do all center in this one Com-
 mandment of *loving God with all our hearts*, and in
loving our Neighbours as ourselves: For the Scripture
 (it is St. *Auslin* who says it) forbids but one only thing,
 which is *Concupiscence*, or the love of the Creature;
 as it commands but one only thing, which is *Charity*,
 and the Love of God: Upon this double Precept is
 founded the whole system of the Christian Religion;
 and it is unto this, say they, according to the ex-
 pression of Jesus Christ; that all the ancient Law
 and the Prophets have reference; and we may add
 also, all the Mysteries, and all the Precepts of the
 new Law: For Love, says St. Paul, is the fulfilling
 of the Law: And these Divines likewise cite a re-
 markable Passage of St. *Auslin* on this subject; viz.
 † He that knows how to love God, & to regulate
 his life by that love, knows all that the Scripture
 propounds to be known: They also might have
 quoted a known saying of this Father, *Omnia peccata*
sunt in universum contra Rationem & Naturæ Legem.
 And I might add the Authority of a greater Man, &
 a Papist too; who says, † Religion adds nothing to
 natural probity, but the consolation of doing that
 for love and obedience to our heavenly Father,
 which Reason itself requires us to do in favour of
 virtue: And the famous *Père Quesnel* says on *Acts* 2. 21.
Le vrai culte n'est plus attaché à un Peuple, Le Christia-
nisme est une Religion universelle.

B. Do Divines always give this character of Chri-
 stianity? do they never distinguish it from the Religion
 of Nature, by supposing it contains certain arbitrary
 Precepts? to which I answer,

A.

* *Præf. au Nouv. Testament* † *Ibid.*

† Archbp. of Cambray *Lettres sur la Religion*, p. 252.
 à Paris.

A. WHEN they consider how repugnant 'tis to the nature of God to give any arbitrary Commands, then indeed the force of truth obliges them to declare there's nothing in Religion but what tends to the good of Mankind; but if at any time they talk otherwise, 'tis for the sake of such things as either directly or indirectly serve their interest. But to remove all scruples I shall more fully prove,

CHAP. IV.

That not only the matter of all God's Laws, but the penalties annex'd to them are for the good of Mankind; even of those who suffer for the breach of them.

B. SHOULD I allow you, that the natural knowledge we have of God is the foundation of all Religion, and that arguing from the Divine Attributes is a most certain way of reasoning, yet is not God's glory one of his divine Attributes? And does not the wisest of Men say, that ** God made all things for himself, and the Wicked for the Day of Evil*: and consequently God's glory, rather than the good of Man, occasion'd the Almighty to create Man, and to give him Laws?

A. AS to this text, I shall answer you from Archbishop Tillotson; that †, *If by God's making all things for himself, he meant, that he aim'd at & intended the manifestation of his Wisdom, Power, & Goodness in the Creation of the World, 'tis most true, that in this sense he made all things for himself; but if we understand it so, as if the goodness of his nature did not move him thereto, but that he had some design to serve, ends and necessities of his own, upon his Creatures, this is far from him. But it's* very

* Prov. 16. 4.

† Sermon. Vol. 7. pag. 19.

„very probable, that neither of these are the meaning
 „of the Text, which may be render'd with much
 „better sense, & nearer to the *Hebrew* thus: *God has*
 „*ordain'd every thing to that which is fit for it, & the*
 „*Wicked hath he ordain'd for the Day of Evil*; that is,
 „the Wisdom of God hath fitted one thing to an-
 „other, Punishment to Sin, the Evil Day to the Evil
 „Doers. This is the sense that *Grotius*, and most of
 the best Commentators put on the text. And here let
 me add, that if there are innumerable places as ca-
 pable of different interpretations, even with relation
 to God and his Attributes, this sure, will be no argu-
 ment not to adhere to what the Light of Nature
 teaches us in this matter: since where texts may be
 taken in different senses, things are as much left to be
 determin'd by our Reason, as if there were no such
 texts. And when we meet with expressions of God's
 doing any thing for his own glory, they can only mean,
 that such is the transcendent excellency of his nature,
 such the inexpressible marks of his Wisdom & Power
 in all his works, that he cou'd not have given greater
 had he design'd nothing but his own glory. And when
 we impute the glory of all we do to him, we thereby
 signify, that we have no power but what we derive
 from him, and that we desire to acknowledge him
 the Author of whatever is praise-worthy in us.

B. Tho' it be allow'd, that God fram'd his Laws,
 & consequently the sanctions that make them Laws,
 for the good of Man, yet a due regard to his own
 honour, the dignity of his Laws and Government,
 will oblige him to punish those, who violate his Laws,
 as for an injury done to himself, distinct from the harm
 that by the breach of them accrues to his Creatures.

4. As no Man breaks the divine Laws out of con-
 tempt to his Maker, or imagines he can do God an
 injury; so God does not make Laws for one end,
 & require the observing them for another; that being
 inconsistent with the Dignity of the divine Legislator,

his

his Laws & Government: but as it was for the sake of Man that he gave him Laws, so he executes them purely for the same reason: since upon his own account, he can't be in the least affected, whether his Laws be, or be not observ'd; and consequently in punishing, no more than rewarding, does he act as a party, much less an injur'd party, who wants satisfaction, or reparation of honour. And indeed, to suppose it, is highly to dishonour him, since God, as he never can be injur'd, so he can never want reparation; and he, who is infinitely satisfy'd in himself, can gain no addition of satisfaction by his Creatures observing his Laws; nor can he, by their not observing them, be reduc'd to a condition of wanting satisfaction, or reparation of honour, or any of those things, which, depending on the opinion of others, are main ingredients in human happiness: And yet even among Men none ought to be punish'd, (since what is past can't be help'd) but to prevent a future breach of the Law; and all Laws being design'd for the good of the governed, „The greatest Monarch is not to punish the „breach of his Laws any otherwise, than the most „petty State: „And tho' all own; it would be tyranny in an earthly Governor to multiply punishments on pretence of vindicating the honour of the Legislator, or as the breach of Law is an injury done to him, and such like; yet some are not ashamed to impute such tyranny to God, and thereby take off from that esteem and Love Men must have for him, did they believe he only punish'd when, and no further than their good requir'd.

Do not we bring God down to ourselves, when we suppose he acts like us poor indigent Creatures, in seeking worship and honour for his own sake? nay, do we not cloath him, who has neither parts nor passions, with the worst of our infirmities, if we represent him as an ambitious, suspicious, wrathful & revengeful Being?

IF we dare consult our Reason, it will tell us that jealousy in point of honour & power, love of fame, and glory can only belong to limited Creatures; but are as necessarily excluded from an unlimited, absolutely perfect Being, as anger, revenge, and such like passions, which would make the Deity resemble the weak, womanish, and impotent part of our nature, rather than the manly, noble, and generous. COULD God strictly speaking, be made angry, provok'd, or griev'd by the conduct of us wretched Mortals, he would not enjoy a moment's quiet; but must be much more miserable than the most unhappy of his Creatures. Or,

HAD God any comfort, or satisfaction to gain from the thoughts and actions of his Creatures, he would never have been without an infinity of them jointly contributing to this end.

IF Religion in general, & every part of it was not useful to Mankind, there would be no reason why they should know it more than other Animals, who, tho' they have wonderful talents (in many of which they exceed Men) given them by God for preserving themselves and their species, yet are utter strangers to Religion, as a thing wholly useless to them.

THE sum of what I have been saying is fully express'd by Job in these words, * *If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? Or if thy transgressions be multiply'd, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth he at thy hands? Thy wickedness may hurt a Man as thou art, and thy righteousness profit the Son of Man.* Or, as Esdras says, † *What is Man that thou shouldst take displeasure at him? Or what is a corruptible Generation, that thou shouldst be so bitter towards it?*

OUR greatest felicity consists in having such an impartial & disinterested Judge as well as Legislator, that whether he punishes, or rewards, he acts alike for our good;

good; That being the end of all his Laws, and consequently of the penalties as well as rewards which make them Laws; whereas your common systems of Divinity represent him full of wrath and fury, ready to glut himself with revenge for the injuries he has suffer'd by the breach of his Laws.

B. Is not God's Justice as well as his Mercy a divine Attribute, and will not that as much oblige him to punish the Breakers of his Laws; as if he had been, as he is sometimes represented, full of anger, wrath, and revenge?

A. Tho' Justice & Mercy can't at the same time be exercis'd in one & the same instance on the same Subject; yet your System Writers, lest they should limit these two Attributes in God, extend them alike to all persons, which is making him neither just, nor merciful; because these Attributes drawing contrary ways must hinder each other's effect.

B. I must confess, I do not see how the same act can be an act both of Justice and Mercy in relation to the same person; or how it can be said that God does Justice on a Sinner, when he shews Mercy to him; and yet we must suppose the Justice as well as Mercy of God to be infinite.

A. THE Justice by which God is righteous in all his actions, and the Mercy by which he is good or beneficent are infinite, and eternally inherent in the divine nature; but these oblige not God either to punish, or pardon any further than his infinite Wisdom sees fit; and such punishing & pardoning are transient acts; the effects of his Will; not properties belonging to his nature. Justice and Mercy among Men relate to different subjects: When the Magistrate punishes a Criminal, 'tis an act of Justice to the publick; and when he pardons him 'tis an act of mercy to the criminal, tho' an act of injustice to the publick; except in such circumstances, where he has ground to believe that pardoning him may be no disadvantage to the publick,

publick, whose interest it is not to lose a useful member.

THE greatest difference in this case between God and Man is, that the most powerful Monarch on earth is of the same nature with his Subjects, and his good involv'd in the good of the whole, & by the breach of his Laws may be injur'd; and as a party injur'd may exact reparation & satisfaction. But this without blasphemy can't be said of God, whose nature is infinitely superior to that of Man; and who, as he was infinitely happy in himself before there was any Creature to adore him, or be obedient to his will; so he must still be such, tho' none of them did obey his Laws, or acknowledge his being: and therefore, in doing acts of Justice he can't, like the Monarchs of this world, propose any security to himself, but acts purely for the good of his Creatures; and the effects of his Justice (they never extending to annihilation) must not only be for the good of others, but even of the persons punish'd; because God, whose Love infinitely exceeds that of mortal Parents, chastises his Children, (and all Mankind are alike his offspring) because he loves them, & designs their amendment; & the reason why God in Scripture is said to be *Love*, must be because all his acts, by what name soever you call them, are acts of pure, impartial, & disinterested Love.

ALL Punishment for punishment's sake is meer cruelty and malice, which can never be in God; nor can he hate any thing he has made; or be subject to such weakness or impotence as to act arbitrarily, or out of spite, wrath, revenge, or any self-interest; and consequently, whatever punishment he inflicts, must be a mark of his Love, in not suffering his Creatures to remain in that miserable state, which is inseparable from sin & wickedness.

As God's infinite goodness appears in the sanctions as well as matter of his Laws, so his infinite Wisdom

knows

knows how to adjust the punishment to the offence; that it may be exactly fitted to produce the desired amendment.

B. DOES not your supposing that God has no other motive in executing his Laws, than he had in making them; viz. the Good of his Creatures; and that all punishment must bear an exact proportion to the offence it is design'd to amend, strike at the absolute eternity of Hell-torments? since there's no proportion between temporary injuries done to all Men, & eternal misery of but one Man; nor can everlasting torment work amendment.

A. I shall at present refer you to Dr. Burnet, *de Statu mortuorum*; and only say with Archbishop Tillotson;*

„ The right that God hath in his Creatures is founded
„ in the benefits he hath conferr'd on them, and the
„ obligation they have to him on that account. Now
„ there's none, who because he has done a benefit,
„ can have, by virtue of that, a right to do a greater
„ evil than the good he has done amounts to; & I
„ think it next to madness to doubt, whether extreme
„ & eternal misery be not a greater evil than simple
„ being is a good. . . . But at a proper time I shall
„ consider what may be said from Scripture as well as
„ Reason, for the doctrine of the absolute eternity of
„ torments; and what will be the condition of those
„ who dye before they are capable of undergoing a tryal,
„ or knowing any thing of Religion. A subject, which,
„ I think, has scarce been consider'd by any one.

* *Serm. Vol. 6. pag. 211. & pag. 621.*

CHAP.

C H A P. V.

*That God requires nothing for his own sake; no
not the Worship we are to render him,
nor the Faith we are to have in him.*

B. **Y**OUR arguing from the Nature of God, that every thing, consequently Faith in him, and even the worship and service we render to him, is wholly for our own sake, will hardly go down with the bulk of Mankind, who imagine, they by those acts do him some real service.

A. If they think so, 'tis a sign they have not been well instructed: the most eminent of our Divines wou'd teach them, that Prayer itself, God knowing beforehand what we will ask, chiefly becomes a duty, as it raises in us a due contemplation of the divine Attributes, & an acknowledgement of his great & constant goodness, and serves to keep up a constant sense of our dependance on him; and as it disposes us to imitate those perfections we adore in him, in being kind & beneficent to one another. There are few so gross as to imagine, we can direct infinite Wisdom in the dispensation of Providence, or persuade him to alter those Laws he contriv'd before the Foundation of the World for puning things in a regular course.

„ Tis, says Archbishop Tillotson, * a great con-
„ descension and goodness in him, to accept our im-
„ perfect praises, and ignorant admiration of him;
„ & were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great
„ and glorious, he wou'd not suffer us to fully his
„ great & glorious name by taking it in our mouths;
„ and were it not for our advantage & happiness to
„ own & acknowledge his benefits, for any real hap-
„ piness and glory that comes to him by it, he cou'd

„ well

„ 2. *Ypl. 7. pag. 28. To. 2. 681.*

„ well enough be without it, and dispense with us
 „ for ever entertaining one thought of him; & were
 „ it not for his goodness might despise the praises of
 „ his Creatures, with infinitely more reason than wise
 „ Men do the applause of Fools. „

„ To imagine, as Dr. Scot observes, * that God
 „ needs our services, and requires them to serve his
 „ own interest, is to blaspheme his All-sufficiency,
 „ and suppose him a poor indigent being, who for
 „ want of perfect satisfaction within himself, is forc'd
 „ to roam abroad, and raise taxes on his Creatures,
 „ to enrich and supply himself: So that whatsoever
 „ some high-flown Enthusiasts may pretend, that 'tis
 „ sordid and mercenary to serve God for our good,
 „ I am sure, to serve him for his good is profane &
 „ blasphemous. „

As able a Divine as this, or perhaps any other Age
 has produc'd, observes, that † „ Nothing can be more
 „ false, or contrary to the nature of the Gospel, than
 „ to fancy God in part design'd to shew he was Master,
 „ by enjoining some Commands, which have no re-
 „ lation to the good of Mankind; Religion was re-
 „ veal'd for us, and not for God, who, absolutely
 „ speaking, neither wants what we think of him, nor
 „ the worship we pay him; but has manifested him-
 „ self to us, only to make us happy. „ And, there-
 „ fore, if from excess of Devotion, a Man neglects the
 „ duties of civil life, he is so far from doing a thing
 „ acceptable to God, that he mistakes the end of Reli-
 „ gion, which is to render him as perfect as may be in
 „ all moral duties whatever.

If any Command was ever given for the sake of
 God, it must certainly be that relating to the institu-
 tion of the Sabbath; and yet we find it said, *The Sab-
 bath is made for Man, and not Man for the Sabbath;*
 C 4 So

* Scot's Christ. Life. Part 2. Vol. 1. Ch. 6.

† Le Clerk's Cause. of Incred. Eng. Transl. p. 219.

So true is it in Divinity as well as Politicks, that *The*

god of the People is the Supreme Law. In short, the worship God requires, is either for his own sake, which supposes his happiness some way or other depends on it; or else (except he requires things to no purpose) for the sake of Men, to raise & keep in their minds the contemplation of an infinitely good Being, and of his Laws, all founded on a disinterested Love to the whole race of Mankind. To imagine the worship of God is ordain'd on any other account, not only destroys one of the greatest motives of Mens doing good to one another, but supposes God not sufficient for, or infinitely happy in himself, but subject to the passions of ambitious & vain-glorious Mortals.

THE Generality of Christians not only believe, that in worshipping God they do him real service, but think he is extremely uneasy, if publick worship is not perform'd in such a manner, & with such rites and ceremonies; & being endlessly divided about these trifles, think they make their court to Heaven, and and highly oblige an omnipotent Being, in destroying those formidable Enemies of God, who presume, without their leave, to worship him after that manner they judge agreeable to his will. And,

THERE are no measures, tho' ever so destructive, but what they, who do not consider the end of God's Laws, may be brought into; as all History sufficiently proves. The *Jews* not only thought that doing the greatest good on their Sabbath, was profaning the day; but were so superstitious as to think, * that all self-defence was then unlawful; and therefore durst not lift up their hands against their Enemies, who butcher'd them as they pleas'd: And many of the primitive Fathers thought the Gospel forbid all self-defence; and herein they are follow'd by a modern Sect, who are their strict imitators in most things.

* *Matth. 5.*

It is no wonder, if some Ecclesiasticks have not been very forward to teach People, that what worship God requires of them, is for their own sakes; since then they could not on pretence of that worship, have claim'd such powers and privileges, as are inconsistent with the common good: & People might then think it their duty so to regulate matters, as that their Priests, upon the whole, considering the charge of maintaining them, and other incidents, should do more good than hurt; which can never happen, till Men are taught 'tis their duty to do good to all, notwithstanding their widest differences as to worship, or any other matter of meer Religion: & 'tis to the honour of our Clergy at present, that so many of them now endeavour to infuse such human and benevolent Principles into a People, who not long since, thought they shew'd a sufficient zeal for Religion, in hating those their Priests hated, without knowing wherefore; and sh'd by their pulpit invectives, thought it their duty to pull down houses of religious worship, & were ready at the direction of their impious leaders, to have perpetrated worse crimes.

B. THERE'S one difficulty, which to me seems insuperable; how to make the Faith requir'd by the Religion of Nature & that of the Gospel, to have the same views, and tend to the same end.

2. If Faith in God himself, no more than any other act of Religion, is requir'd for God's sake, but our own; can Faith in one sent by God be requir'd for any other end? Especially considering, that no Person is ever the more known to posterity, because his Name is transmitted to them: when we say, *Cesar* conquer'd *Pempry*, we having no idea of either can only mean, Some-body conquer'd Some-body; and have we more distinct ideas of *Jesus* & *Pilate*? And tho' we had a personal idea of the former, he could receive no advantage or disadvantage by what we thought of him. And if Faith in him was requir'd

C. 5 for

for a cause antecedent to his being so sent, sounded in his & our nature, & the relation we always stood in to him; would not the eternal Reason of things have made it manifest? That which concern'd all, must be knowable by all, for which reason the Apostle says, *That which may be known of God* (and none can know that which may not be known) *was manifest in the Gentiles.* And,

THE end of Christ's coming seems not to teach Men new duties, but (repentance being the first thing preach'd by him and his Apostles both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*) to repent of the breach of known duties. And Jesus does not say, He was sent to all *Israel*, * *but to the lost Sheep of the House of Israel*; and that the † *Son of Man is come to save that which was lost*: And his Parable about the *lost Sheep*, ‡ suppos'd all were not lost. And when it was objected to him, that he kept company with Sinners, he owns the charge, & says, § *The whole need no Physician, but they that are sick*; which would have been an improper answer, if he thought that all stood in need of him, and his spiritual physick. And to confirm this, he adds, ¶ *I am not come to call the righteous, but Sinners to repentance*; and that *There's more joy in Heaven for one Sinner that repents, than ninety nine just persons that need no repentance.* Which is dividing Mankind into two parts, the *whole* or *righteous*, and the *sick* or *Sinners*; & that his business was intirely with the latter. The not observing this distinction has been the occasion of many uncharitable & gross mistakes: & 'tis somewhat strange; that Jesus, who best knew how far his Commission extended, shou'd not be credited in this matter; especially considering that in Religion there are no *secrets*, or *secrets*, but all may know what God requires of all; and there is but one universal remedy for all sick persons; *Repentance* and *Amendment*. And if God, who is

* *Mat. 15. 24.* † *18. 11.* ‡ *Luke 15. 7.*

§ *Mat. 9. 12.* ¶ *Ibid. Vers. 13.*

no respect of persons, will judge the world in righteousness, and they that in every nation fear him, and work righteousness, shall be accepted of him; they, certainly, are whole, and need no Physician, who do of themselves what will make them acceptable to him; living as those whom Christ came to reform were taught to live. Is it not absurd to suppose, that till then none had sufficient means given them to answer the end for which all were created?

THE Catholick Epistle of St. Barnabas will inform you of the sentiments of the Ancients on this head. This great Apostle (as translated by Dr. Wake) says, "That Jesus, when he chose his Apostles, which were afterwards to publish his Gospel, took Men who had been very great sinners; that thereby he might plainly shew, that *† He came not to call the righteous, but Sinners to Repentance.*" The words are fuller in the Original, *ὅτι οὐκ ἦν ἵνα ἀποκαλέσῃ τοὺς δικαίους.*

B. THIS may be a forg'd passage.

A. Origen owns it to be genuine; for when Celsus (I will give you his words in the Latin Translation) says, *† Jesus a scitis decem undecimque famosis hominibus, publicanis navisque nequissimis; cum his ultro citroque fuerat, corrompente cibos sordide ac turpiter.* Origen says, *§ Extat sane in Barnabæ Catholica Epistola scriptum; Jesum ad Apostolicam functionem elegerit homines omni iniquitate iniquiores.* And it may be said in support of St. Barnabas, that the Apostles first became Jesus's Disciples upon temporal motives; and the belief of Christ's temporal Kingdom was so firmly rooted in them, that Jesus neither during his life, nor even after his resurrection was able to remove it. At the last Supper there was a strife amongst them; *¶ Who should be accounted the greatest?* The meanest (as Bishop Parker expresses it) hoped at least to have been made Lord

Wate's Transl. §. 5. p. 272. † Mat. 9. 13.

Origen contr. Celsum. l. 1. p. 47. § Ib. p. 49.

Luc. 22. 24.

„ Mayor of Capernaum. And even at his Ascension the only Question his Disciples ask'd was, * *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?* †

But to take away all subterfuges, what can be more requir'd than such qualifications as will make Jesus in the last day declare, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the World?* And what are those qualifications, but living up to the Law of Reason, in exercising acts of benevolence, goodness, &c. ? That this was the *Unum necessarium* is plain from his answer, *Depart from me ye that work iniquity, made to those who had omitted these things, tho' they pleaded, ‡ They had prophesy'd in his name, and in his name call out Devils, and done many wonderful works.* St. Paul in the first Chapter to the Romans is very large, in shewing that the *Gentiles* cou'd not plead ignorance of their duty, either to God or Man; and as sinning against knowledge were inexcusable; & pursuing the same subject in the second, he says, that *God who is no Respector of Persons* will deal with every one both Jew & Gentile according to their deeds; and those by which they are to be judg'd are either moral or immoral; and had there been any thing else requir'd by the written Law, it cou'd not be said that *the Gentiles*, who were not ignorant of their duty either to God or Man, *did by Nature the things contained in the Law.* §

And does not St. Paul, in another place, put our future state on the same foot; in supposing we shall be dealt with at the last day † *according to what we have done in the body, whether good or bad.* In short, if the tree is to be known by its fruit, and it brings forth good fruit, the means by which this good fruit is produc'd are not material; but if it does not, no means whatever can hinder it from being *hewn down, & cast into the fire.* §

§ The grand deciding question

* Acts 1. 6.

† Mat. 7. 22, 23.

‡ 2 Cor. 5. 10.

§ Mat. 7. 19.

(says Dr. South) §, at the last day will be, not what
 „ you have said, or what you have believ'd; but what
 „ you have done more than others. * God is pleas'd
 „ to vouchsafe the best he can give, only to the best
 „ we can do. But to go the bottom of this matter,
 „ Faith consider'd in itself can neither be a Virtue,
 „ nor a Vice; because Men can no otherwise believe
 „ than as things appear to them. Nay, can there be an
 „ higher affront to God than to suppose, he requires Men
 „ to judge otherwise than the faculties he has given
 „ them enable them to do? Or what can be more absurd
 „ than to imagine, that God will shew his favour to one
 „ for believing what he could not but believe; and his
 „ displeasure to another for not believing what he could
 „ not believe? & therefore Faith is only to be esteem'd
 „ by the works it produces; for the strongest Faith may
 „ be worse than no Faith at all. *The Devils themselves,*
 „ (who are held the most wicked beings in the Universe)
 „ believe, & tremble. Happy had it been for *Christendom,*
 „ if zeal for what the prevailing parties call'd, *The Or-*
 „ *thodox Faith,* had made none but themselves to
 „ tremble.

Dr. Wainby expresses himself very accurately on this
 „ point. †, Belief, or disbelief can neither be a Virtue,
 „ or a Crime in any one, who uses the best means in
 „ his power of being inform'd. If a proposition is
 „ evident, we cannot avoid believing it, and where
 „ is the merit or piety of a necessary assent? If it is
 „ not evident, we cannot help rejecting it, or doubting
 „ of it. And where is the crime of not performing
 „ impossibilities, or not believing what does not ap-
 „ pear to us to be true? What worse opinion can
 „ we have of the divine Goodness, than to imagine a
 „ mean denial of our Reason, or a wretched affectation
 „ of believing any point too hard for our understanding,
 „ can entitle us to the favour of God.

§ Sermon, Vol. 3. pag. 174. * Ibid. p. 172.
 † Dr. Wainby's Last Thoughts, p. 49.

IF Charity, which comprehends doing all possible good to our Fellow-Creature; is to be destroy'd for the sake of Faith; or if incapacities, fines, imprisonments, rods, gibbets, racks, and fire, are marks of Charity, the Christian world has outdone all Mankind in acts of charity: but the description St. Paul gives of Charity, is so far from requiring us to make others suffer, that itself *suffers long, seeks not her own, bears all things, endures all things;* and strictly enjoins us so to do.

H A R E is the practice of the Christian World on the side of Faith, sacrificing Charity, and all that's valuable to it: & on the other side, Christ & his Apostles preferring Charity before it. St. Paul, speaking of himself, says, * *Tho' I have the gift of prophecy, & understand all mysteries, & all knowledge; And tho' I have all faith, and could remove mountains, & have no charity, I am nothing: Or tho' I give my body to be burnt (which shews the highest act of Faith) and have not charity, it profiteth nothing.* And in another place he says, † *Above all things put on Charity, which is the bond of perfectness.* And again, ‡ *The End of the commandment is Charity; & Love is the fulfilling of the Law.* And, § *If any provide not for his own, especially those of his own house (which is but one species of Charity) he has denied the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel.* And St. Peter likewise speaks as highly of it in saying, ¶ *Above all things have fervent Charity among yourselves; for Charity shall cover a multitude of Sins; which can't be said of Faith, because that without Charity profiteth nothing, in not answering the end for which it was given.* And St. James * calls Love *the Royal Law.* And St. John says, † *If any Man says I love God, & hateth his Brother, he is a liar.* And is not he likewise a liar, who shews all the marks of hatred to his Brother,

Brother,

* 1 Cor. 13. * Ibid. † Col. 3. 14.

† 1 Tim. 1. 5. § Rom. 13. 10. § 1 Tim. 5. 8.

¶ 1 Pet. 4. 8. * James 2. 8. † 1 John 4. 20.

Brother, & yet pretends to love him, & makes those very marks an argument of his love. In Jesus Christ, says the Apostle Paul, * neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision availeth any thing, but faith which worketh by Love. — † For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self. And Christ, in saying, ‡ By this shall all Men know ye are my Disciples, if ye love one another, supposes Mens loving one another so essential to Christianity, as by that token alone all Men may know who are his Disciples; and if they who thus love one another are of course his Disciples, whose Disciples then are they, who, as all Men know, make people hate, & harrafs one another, and pretend Christ's commission for so doing?

Origen speaking of the Faith of Christians, cou'd not (was there any thing peculiar in their Faith) have said, § 'Tis the conformity of our Faith with the common innate notions of all Mankind, that has given it entrance into the minds of candid & ingenuous hearers. And.

Our Divines (since the liberty they enjoy has enabl'd them to think, and speak their thoughts more freely than formerly) when they write in defence of Christianity, endeavour to shew that the Faith the Scripture requires, is conformable to what Origen calls, *The common, and innate notions of Mankind*. I do not find, that the Deau. of *Sarum* is censur'd for affirming in defence of Christianity, that §, The Scripture notion of Faith is very plain and obvious, viz. not a speculative and philosophical, but a religious and practical Faith; and 'tis built on this principle, That God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; That religious Faith is a full conviction of mind, that an eternal, immense Being,

* Gal. 5. 6. † Ver. 14. ‡ *John* 13. 35.

§ Origen contra Gelsam. l. 3. p. 135.

§ Origen of Moral Exil. pag. 90.

„ infinitely wise, just, & good, not only actually existing,
 „ but is the Governor of the World; prescribes Laws
 „ to the Consciences, & to the actions of Men; takes
 „ notice of their compliance with, or transgression
 „ of them; & will certainly reward, or punish them,
 „ according as their works have been. To live under
 „ this sense and expectation, is to live a life of Faith,
 „ and is co-incident with a life of Virtue. All the
 „ species, or particular instances of Faith may be re-
 „ duc'd to this, as so many branches springing from it:
 „ And to explain them in any other sense, as if Faith
 „ & Reason were oppos'd to each other, & Religion
 „ and Virtue two different things, is to blind Mens
 „ understandings, and to confound the plainest, and
 „ most numerous texts of Scripture.

A NOTHER learned Divine, in defence of the Chri-
 stian Religion, says, * „ If it should happen, that we
 „ cannot so satisfactorily evince the certainty of the
 „ Scripture-History against scrupulous, nice, & scepti-
 „ cal Wits, yet we find ourselves oblig'd to the belief,
 „ & practice of what is really the Christian Religion;
 „ because 'tis nothing else, as to the Faith & Morals
 „ of it, but Natural Religion.

THE great *Grotius*, in a Discourse own'd to be the
 best that was ever writ in defence of Christianity, lays
 it down as a Maxim, that † „ 'Tis absolutely repugnant
 „ to the goodness of God; that those, who without
 „ respect to worldly advantage, seek after the way
 „ which leads to eternal happiness, imploring withal
 „ the divine assistance, and submitting themselves in-
 „ tirely to his Providence, should not be able to find it.
 „ And if this is too evident to be deny'd, can there
 „ be any thing either in relation to Faith or manners,
 „ in the way that leads to eternal happiness, but may
 „ be found at all times & places of every one, who
 „ diligently searches after it.

AND

* *Nys* of Nat. & Reveal. Relig. pag. 127.

† *Grotius* de Verit. Chr. Relig. lib. 6. Sect. 2.

AND an eminent Divine, who is not look'd on to have altogether so extensive a charity as *Grotius*, yet says, *, I think we may pronounce safely in this matter, that the goodness & mercy of God is such, that he never defers a sincere person, nor suffers any one that shall live (even according to these measures of sincerity) up to what he knows, to perish for want of any knowledge necessary; and what is more, sufficient to save him., Which supposes no Faith, or knowledge necessary to salvation, but what all are capable of acquiring by virtue of that † *Light, which lighteth every Man that cometh into the World.* And our Saviour himself says, ‡ *Seek, and ye shall find.* By this you may see what Faith is requir'd, and for what end.

If Man, as our Divines maintain against *Hobbs*, is a social creature, who naturally loves his own species, and is full of pity, tenderness, & benevolence; and if Reason, which is the proper nature of Man, can never lead Men to any thing but universal love & kindness, and there be no part of Natural Religion, or any Faith it requires, but highly tends to improve this kind and benign temper; how comes it to pass, that what is taught for Religion in so many places of *Christendom*, has transform'd this mild & gentle Creature into fierce and cruel; and made him act with rage & fury against those who never did, or intended him the least harm? Is not this chiefly owing to such a Faith as works not by love; and such a Zeal as, not being according to Knowledge, has destroy'd all good works, & is utterly inconsistent with the end of all Religion. But no wonder, if Men, who most uncharitably damn one another for such matters of Faith as they dare not trust Reason to judge of, should hate & persecute each other on the same account.

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* *Saur's Serm.* Vol. 1. pag. 298.

† *John* 1. 9. ‡ *Mat.* 7. 7.

THE *Epicureans*, tho' they had exalted notions of their Gods, yet because they asserted it beneath their dignity to concern themselves with human affairs; were at all times censur'd as Atheists; which shews that 'twas accounted much the same to believe no Gods; as to believe them useless to Mankind. But certainly, believing the Deity to be indolent, can't be so bad as believing him so cruel, as to oblige Christians to persecute, ruin, & destroy even their Brethren, for things too, no ways contributing to the good of Mankind; since this is downright *Demonism*: And yet in what Age of the Church, would not those conscientious people that chanc'd to be undermost, have thought themselves happy, if the Men in power had not had a worse notion of the Deity than that of indolence.

CHAP. VI.

That the Religion of Nature is an absolutely perfect Religion; and that external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from its perfection: and that true Religion, whether internally or externally reveal'd, must be the same.

HAVING prov'd, That God requires nothing for his own sake; I shall now, the way being thus prepar'd, shew you, *That the Religion of Nature is absolutely perfect; & that external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from its perfection*: And in order to it let me ask you, Why you believe the Gospel a Law of absolute perfection, incapable of any addition, diminution, or alteration?

B. BECAUSE 'tis the last Law of God's giving.
 A. WAS it not such in itself, that cou'd not make it so; since the Law given to the Jews was for many ages the only external Law: And yet, I suppose, you grant

grant that this abrogated Law was far from deserving such a character. But were there any thing in this argument, it makes wholly for the Law of Nature; since that is not only the first, but the last Law of God's giving: if that can be said to be last, which is eternal: a Law, by which God governs his own actions, and by which he expects all the rational world shou'd govern theirs. And therefore, notwithstanding the promulgation of the Gospel, he continues daily to implant it in the minds of all Men, Christians as well as others: and consequently, 'tis as necessary for them as for others; as necessary since, as before the coming of Christ: And I may add too, not only necessary to be observ'd in this World, and ten thousand more, were there so many, but in Heaven itself, & that too for ever.

B. SHOU'D I grant that my argument, from the Gospel's being the last Law of God's giving, does not fully prove its absolute perfection; yet it will undeniably follow from the great agreement there is between that & the Law of Nature; it neither forbidding what that requires, nor requiring what that forbids; and in a Word, containing nothing in it unworthy, but every thing worthy of an absolutely perfect Law-giver.

A. IN saying this, you own the Law of Nature to be the standard of perfection; and that by it we must judge antecedently to any traditional Religion what is, or is not a Law absolutely perfect, & worthy of such a Being for its Legillator.

B. INDEED; it must be own'd, that Divines as well as others, make the same concessions in relation to Natural Religion, which Dr. *Prideaux* does in his celebrated Letter to the *Deists* at the end of *Mahomet's* Life:

„ Let what is written in all the Books of the New Testament be try'd by that which is the Touchstone of all Religions, I mean that Religion of Nature and Reason, which God has written in the hearts

„ * *Pag. 127. Edit. 7. effata.*

„ hearts of every one of us from the first creation ;
 „ and if it varies from it in any one particular, if it
 „ prescribes any one thing, which may in the minutest
 „ circumstances thereof be contrary to its righteousness,
 „ I will then acknowledge this to be an argu-
 „ ment against us, strong enough to overthrow the
 „ whole cause, and make all things else that can be
 „ said for it totally ineffectual for its support.

A. I desire no more than to be allow'd, that there's
 a Religion of Nature & Reason written in the hearts
 of every one of us from the first Creation, by which
 all Mankind must judge of the truth of any instituted
 Religion whatever: and if it varies from the Religion
 of Nature and Reason in any one particular, nay, in
 the minutest circumstance, that alone is an argument,
 which makes all things else that can be said for its
 support totally ineffectual. If so, must not Natural
 Religion and external Revelation, like two Tallies,
 exactly answer one another, without any other differ-
 ence between them, but as to the manner of their
 being deliver'd? And how can it be otherwise? Can
 Laws be imperfect, where a Legislator is absolutely
 perfect? Can time discover any thing to him, which
 he did not foresee from eternity? And as his Wisdom
 is always the same, so is his Goodness: & consequently
 from the consideration of both these his Laws must
 always be the same. — Is it not from the infinite
 Wisdom and Goodness of God, that you suppose the
 Gospel a most perfect Law, incapable of being repeal'd,
 or alter'd, or of having additions? And must not you
 own the Law of Nature as perfect a Law, except you
 will say, that God did not arrive to the perfection of
 Wisdom and Goodness till about seventeen hundred
 years since?

To plead, that the Gospel is incapable of any ad-
 ditions, because the Will of God is immutable, and
 his Law too perfect to need them, is an argument,
 was Christianity a new Religion, which destroys itself:
 since

since from the time it commenc'd, you must own God is mutable; and that such additions have been made to the all-perfect Laws of infinite Wisdom, as constitute a New Religion. The Reason why the Law of Nature is immutable, is, because it is founded on the unalterable reason of things: but if God is an arbitrary Being, and can command things meerly from Will and Pleasure, some things to-day, and others to-morrow, there is nothing either in the nature of God, or in the things themselves, to hinder him from perpetually changing his mind. If he once commanded things without reason, there can be no reason why he may not endlessly change such commands.

I think, no Man has more fully done justice to the Law of Nature, than a Divine of that Church which requires so many things contrary to that Law; I mean the celebrated *Charron*, in his *Treatise of Wisdom*, whose authority is certainly not the less for being translated by the late Dean of *Canterbury*: He says, *
 „ The Law of Nature, by which I mean Universal
 „ Reason and Equity, is the candle of our Maker,
 „ lighted up in every breast, to guide, and shine per-
 „ petually. This is the dictate of God himself, he is
 „ the King, & this the fundamental Law of the Uni-
 „ verse; a ray and beam of the divine Nature, which
 „ flows from, & has a necessary connexion & depen-
 „ dence upon that eternal & immutable Law, which
 „ the Almighty prescribes to his own actions. A Man,
 „ who proceeds on this principle, is his own rule;
 „ for he acts in agreement with the noblest, & most
 „ valuable part of his nature: This Man's honesty is
 „ essential to, & inseparable from him, not precarious
 „ and uncertain, and owing meerly to chance & oc-
 „ casion; for this Light & Law is born with, & bred
 „ in us; a piece of our frame & constitution; & from
 „ thence obtains the name of Nature, and the Law
 „ of Nature: Such a Man, by consequence, will be a

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good

„ good Man constantly, and at all times, his virtue
 „ will be uniform; & every place, every emergency
 „ will find him the same; for this Law of Nature is
 „ perpetual, the obligation of it is lasting & inviolable,
 „ the equity and reason of it are eternal, written in
 „ large & indelible characters; no accident can deface
 „ them, no length of time waste, or wear them out.
 „ — These first principles, which are the ground of
 „ all moral institutions, admit of no change, no in-
 „ crease, no abatement, no fits, no starts, no ebbings
 „ & flowings. — Why then, vain Man, dost thou
 „ trouble thyself to seek abroad for some Law or Rule
 „ to Mankind? What can Books, or Masters tell thee,
 „ which thou might'st not tell thyself? What can study,
 „ or travel shew, which without being at the expence
 „ of so much pains, thou might'st not see at home,
 „ by descending into thy own conscience, and hear-
 „ kening attentively to its own admonitions?
 „ To what purpose is all this labour and cost?
 „ The toilsom tumbling over of Codes & Institutes?
 „ — The two Tables of *Moses*, the twelve Tables
 „ of the *Greeks*, the Law written in the heart of them
 „ who had no Law, & in short all the rules of equity
 „ & good Laws, that have any where been enacted,
 „ and obtained in the world, are nothing but copies
 „ & transcripts produc'd in open Court, and publish'd
 „ from that *original*, which thou keepest close within
 „ thee; and yet all the while pretendest to know
 „ nothing of the matter, striving & suppressing as much
 „ as in thee lieth the brightness of that Light, which
 „ shines within thee. As this invisible fountain within
 „ is more exuberant & plenteous, so it is more lively,
 „ pure, and strong, than any of the streams deriv'd
 „ from it; of which we need but this single testi-
 „ mony, that when any disputes arise about the right
 „ meaning of any positive Law, the constant, & best
 „ method of understanding the equity & true intent
 „ of it, is by running back to its head, & observing
 „ what

„ what is most agreeable to the Law of Nature: This
 „ is the test & touch, this is the level, & the truth,
 „ by which the rest are to be judged.

„ And in truth all Laws, whether the Law of Na-
 „ tions; or those of particular Countries, are only the
 „ Law of Nature adjust'd, & accommodated to circum-
 „ stances; nor can Religion, even in relation to the
 „ Worship of God, as it is a reasonable service, be any
 „ thing, but what necessarily flows from the considera-
 „ tion of God, and the Creatures. 'Twas this made the
 „ great Mr. Selden say, in an expression somewhat homely,
 „ That Men look after Religion, as the Butcher
 „ did after his knife, when he had it in his mouth.

„ THE Religion of Nature is so entirely calculated
 „ for the good of humane society, that tho' a Man,
 „ hurry'd with the violence of his passions, breaks it him-
 „ self, yet he wou'd have all others most strictly observe
 „ it: and accordingly all Legislators punish the breach
 „ of it. Whereas no Man rejects any positive Institution
 „ himself, but is willing that all others shou'd do so too:
 „ which plainly shews, Men do not apprehend it to be
 „ for the general good of Mankind. And the contending
 „ Parties in Religion, with equal confidence, cry,
 „ That if our Religion be not true, God must be
 „ wanting to Mankind, in what concerns their eternal
 „ happiness; he must be wanting to himself, and to
 „ his own attributes of Goodness, Justice, & Truth:
 „ It's repugnant to the very Notion of a God, to let
 „ Men be ignorant in a matter of such importance
 „ without any help or remedy. This reasoning,
 „ if true, necessarily infers some universal Law knowable
 „ at all times; and can't be apply'd to any partial Reli-
 „ gion unknown to the world for many Ages; and, as
 „ not being discoverable by Reason, still unknown to
 „ the greater part of it.

„ In a word, if the highest internal excellence, the
 „ greatest plainness & simplicity, unanimity, universality,

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anti-

antiquity; nay, eternity, can recommend a Law; and these, 'tis own'd do, in an eminent degree, belong to the Law of Nature: A Law; which does not depend on the uncertain meaning of words & phrases in dead languages, much less on types, metaphors, allegories, parables, or on the skill or honesty of weak or designing transcribers (not to mention Translators) for many Ages together, but on the immutable relation of things always visible to the whole world. And therefore Dr. Scot justly says, * „ Moral Obligations „ are not founded like positive ones upon mutable circumstances (which suppose they can only oblige in „ certain circumstances; but upon firm & everlasting „ reasons; upon reasons that to all eternity will carry „ with them the same force & necessity: as long as „ we are Creatures of an infinitely perfect Creator, „ it will be as much our duty as 'tis now, to submit „ our will and affections to our Reason; & as long „ as we are related to other reasonable Creatures, it „ will be as much our duty as now to be kind, just, „ and peaceable in all our intercourses with them: „ So that these are such duties as no will can dispense „ with, no reason abrogate, no circumstances disannul; „ but as long as God is what he is, & we are what „ we are; they must, and will oblige us.

I could, from many other considerations, shew you the absolute perfection of Natural Religion: For instance, must we not, except we speak without any meaning, or have no true meaning of the Word *God*, intend by it a Being of all perfections, free from all those defects, which belong even to the most perfect Creatures? And must we not have an idea of these Perfections, before we can know whether there is any Being who has enjoy'd them from eternity; & must we not know there is such a Being from our Reason, before we can come to this question, *Whether he has made any external Revelation?* Nay, examining into this

* Scot's Christ. Life. Partiz. Vol. i. Ch. i. p. 66.

this question would be to very little purpose, except we could know whether this Being is bound by his external word, & had not either at the time of giving it a secret will inconsistent with his reveal'd will; or has not since chang'd his will. This can't be known from any external Revelation; tho' it express'd itself ever so plainly; because the question being, *Whether God is oblig'd to do, as he in it says he will do*, this must be resolv'd antecedently by the light of Nature, which must discover to us the veracity of God, and the immutability of his will: & the same reasons which will prove he could not change his will since he made an external Revelation, will prove his will was always unchangeable, and at all times the same; whether internally, or externally reveal'd. Nor could we take a step towards proving the veracity of God, or the immutability of his will; or indeed, any of his perfections besides Power, without knowing that the will of God is always determin'd by the nature & reason of things: Otherwise falsehood and mutability might be the will of God, and there could be no such thing in Nature as Good and Evil, but an arbitrary will would govern all things.

Were we not capable by our Reason of distinguishing Good from Evil, or knowing from the consideration of the invariable perfections of God, what the divine Goodness could command, or forbid his Creatures antecedently to any external Revelation, we could not distinguish the true instituted Religion from the many false ones: or if by accident we stumb'd on it, avoid running into many absurdities in the interpretation of it, thro' the difficulties that must attend a Book writ in a dead language, & so many ages since; & where thro' the vast variety of readings we might mistake the true reading: and tho' we were certain of the Letter, even *the Letter kills*. *

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IF

If Man had not natural abilities to distinguish between Good & Evil, or to know what is pleasing, or displeasing to God, how could we say he was a moral Agent, or even an accountable Creature?

Did we not allow that Men, by the Light of Nature, are capable of forming a sound judgment in matters of Religion, they might be so impos'd on by controverted, or misinterpreted, not to say forg'd Texts, as to admit several objects of divine worship in their practice, while in their words they own but one: or, in order to advance a supernatural Charity, destroy all natural Humanity, and believe our Love to God may be best shewn by our hatred to our Fellow-Creatures: and introduce such abominable notions, as may make Religion, instead of a benefit, become a mischief to Mankind.

WHEREAS, if we allow the Light of Nature sufficient to enable us to judge rightly in these matters, and consequently to distinguish truth from falsehood, we must own, since there can be no disagreement in truth, that there's an exact conformity between internal & external Revelation, with no other difference but as to the manner of their being reveal'd: Or in other words, that the Gospel, since 'tis impossible for Men at the same time to be under different obligations, can't command those things which the Law of Nature forbids; or forbid what that commands; nor can any thing be a part of Religion by one Law, which by the other is Superstition: nor can external Revelation make that the Will of God, which the Light of Nature continually represents as unworthy of having God for its Author.

THE judicious Writer of the *Rational Catechism* lately reprinted says, * „That one of the most universal causes of the great differences among Men in „ matters of Religion, is, that they have not examin'd „ things to the bottom; they have fail'd in their

* Pref. to *Catechism*.

foundation-work; they have too much slighted that Philosophy which is the Natural Religion of all Men; and which being natural, must needs be universal & eternal: They have forsaken the Rule of right Reason, which is only capable to produce true symmetry in their intellectual buildings; and they have apply'd themselves without any Rule to the interpretation of words and phrases, which being easily susceptible of various senses, have produc'd as many deform'd irregularities.

Tho' all parties alike pretend to aim at truth; yet none of them, I think, inform us what Truth is, or wherein it consists. Now if Truth in general, implies an agreement of our ideas with the things themselves, Religious Truth, or true Religion must consist in the agreement of our ideas with those things which are the subjects of our religious inquiry, *viz.* the nature of God and Man; and false Religion must consist in having ideas that are not agreeable to, or do not truly represent those subjects: and this agreement which we call Truth in respect to *Theory*, is what we term, in relation to *Action*, fit, just, good, or reasonable. Thus God is frequently styl'd in Scripture the *God of Truth*, because his ideas of things and the things themselves exactly correspond; & all his actions are agreeable to the relation things have to one another. And when our actions are such, we do all that's fit, just, & reasonable, all that God or Man can require; & from hence too it follows, that Iniquity is the same in action, as Falsity is in theory.



That Natural and Reveal'd Religion having the same End, their Precepts must be the same.

ALLOWING that the natural knowledge we have of God, ourselves, & our fellow Creatures, is the foundation of all Religion, may not external Revelation, building on this foundation, erect a larger & nobler edifice; by extending it to such things as the light of Nature cou'd not reach, without contradicting any thing it teaches?

A. I thought I had obviated this objection, by proving that the Religion of Nature was so perfect, that nothing cou'd be added to it; & that the truth of all Revelation was to be judg'd of by its agreement with it. However, since this objection is the most plausible of any you have yet made, I reply, That if our natural notions of the divine perfections demonstrate, that God will require nothing of his Creatures but what tends to their good; whatsoever is of this kind, is a superstructure that belongs to the Law of Nature; or, in other words, what the reason, or nature of the things themselves plainly point out to us: and for all other matters, which have no such tendency, you must seek another foundation, another Nature very different from the divine, to build *your hazy fables upon*. And: Is it be evident from the Light of Nature, what are those relations we stand in to God & our Fellow-Creatures, and that neither God nor Man, without acting tyrannically, can require more than those require; can external Revelation any more than internal exceed these bounds?

Is original Revelation comprehends every thing obligatory on the account of its excellency; that is, every thing which tends to the honour of God, or the good of Man, (and these are the only ends of *Tradition*;

tional Religion) no arbitrary, or merely positive precepts, as not tending to the honour of God, or the good of Man, can belong either to Natural, or Reveal'd Religion.

By the Law of Nature as well as the Gospel, the honour of God, and the good of Man, being the two grand, or general Commandments, all particular Precepts must be comprehended under these two, & belong alike to the Law of Nature as well as the Gospel; and what does not, can belong to neither. Thus any particular Precept, if by change of circumstances it ceases to contribute to the honour of God, or the good of Man, much more if it become prejudicial to either, must lose its obliging force.

THERE must be some Rule, or Rules, which bind without exception, *because every exception to a Rule is built on some Rule or other*; & as there can't be Rules, so there can't be Exceptions *ad infinitum*; and I suppose, you will not deny, but that these two grand Rules, or Commandments, *the Honour of God, & the Good of Man*, are obligatory without exception. And yet these would be to little purpose, cou'd not Reason tell Men how to apply them in all conditions, & circumstances of life.

B. SUPPOSING no particular Precepts can oblige, if they chance to clash with either of those Commandments, yet what is to be done if these two interfere with one another; must the Good of Man, or the Honour of God take place?

A. THESE two grand Laws are in effect the same, since what promotes the Honour of God necessarily promotes the Good of Man: The more we love and honour God, the more we shall imitate him in our extensive love to our Fellow-Creatures, who are equally the children of God. The greater our veneration is for our Maker, the more it will excite us to copy those perfections of Goodness & Benevolence we adore in him: so that the duty of a truly religious person, and of

of a good subject and citizen are the same with relation to God and Man; for the more he honours God, the more zealous will he be to act the Patriot; & the more he does that, the more he honours God; because the happier Men are, the more reason they have to honour that God, who made 'em so. The way to * glorify your Father which is in Heaven, is to let your light so shine before Men, that they may see your good works. And † herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit. And indeed, nothing can be plainer from Scripture, than that these two great Duties of the Love of God, & our Neighbour, include each other. ‡ If, says the Apostle, † a Man say I love God, and hateth his Brother, he is a Liar. And, § If we love one another, God dwelleth in us; & the Love of God is perfected in us. Again, ¶ Let us love one another; every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loves not, knoweth not God. ✠ But who so hateth this world's goods, and seeth his Brother have need, & scanteth up his bowels of compassion from him; how dwelleth the Love of God in him? And it was this consideration, that made that great Emperor and Philosopher *Marcus Antoninus* say, *

„ Thou wilt never do any thing purely humane in a
„ right manner, unless thou knowest the relation it
„ bears to things divine; nor any thing divine, unless
„ thou knowest all the ties it has to things humane.

Is a word, As Man is by Nature qualify'd to answer all the purposes of a social life, and to act a part agreeable to Reason, so in doing this he gives glory to his Maker, by fulfilling the end of his creation: but if he goes contrary to the Light of Nature in acting an unfocial and hurtful part, he reflects dishonour on his Creator by defeating as far as in him lies, the design of God in making him a social Creature. But

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* Mat. 5. 16. † John 15. 8. ‡ 1 John 2. 20.
§ 1b. Ver. 12. ¶ 1b. Ver. 7. 8. ✠ 1 John 3. 17.
* Lib. 3. c. 12. in Mr. & Madam Dacier's Version.

BECAUSE Bigots represent these two grand Obligations as frequently clashing; & oppose things which are for the good of Man, on pretence that the Honour of God will either directly, or indirectly suffer by it; & on this pretence have frequently done such mischiefs to their fellow-Creatures, as to give occasion for that proverbial saying, *In nomine Domini incipit omne malum*; Give me leave to say, that we can no otherwise honour God, since that consists in having the most exalted ideas of him, than by supposing him benevolent in the most universal & impartial manner: and consequently, to imagine he can command any thing inconsistent with this universal benevolence, is highly to dishonour him; 'tis to destroy his impartial Goodness, and make his Power & Wisdom degenerate into cruelty & craft.

THO' we have receiv'd our all from God, we can give him nothing, nor do him the least kindness, much less return kindness for kindness; & therefore, the only way we have to shew our real gratitude to our great Creator & Benefactor, is to be as useful as we can to his Creatures, whom we ought to love as ourselves: and if there can now be a Sin against the Holy Ghost, I shou'd not scruple to say, it is making Religion the means of destroying the end of all Religion: & rendering the Creature miserable on pretence of doing Honour to the Creator; who, as he has impress'd on *bodies*, in order to preserve the natural World, a tendency to each other, so he has implanted in *minds*, the better to support the moral world, a tendency to be kind & beneficent to one another. And so deep is the impression of benevolence, that we can't but applaud a person who does brave & generous actions, even tho' we suffer by them; & as much condemn him who acts basely & treacherously, tho' we are ever so great gainers.

Is there then (*says a noble Author*) * a natural Beauty of Figures, and is there not as natural a one

* *Characterist.* Vol. 2. pag. 414.

„ of Actions? No sooner the eye opens upon *Figures*,
 „ the ear to *Sounds*, than straight the *Beautiful* results,
 „ and *Grace & Harmony* are known, & acknowledg'd;
 „ no sooner are Actions view'd, no sooner the *human*
 „ *Affections* and *Passions* discern'd (and they are most
 „ of them as soon discern'd as felt) than straight an
 „ *inward eye* distinguishes, and sees the *fair & shapely*,
 „ the *amiable* and *admirable* apart from the *deform'd*,
 „ the *soul*, the *odious*, or the *despicable*. How is it pos-
 „ sible therefore nor to own, „ that as the *distinctions*
 „ have their foundation in *Nature*, the discernment
 „ itself is *natural*, and from *Nature alone*.

B. THIS, I own, is a beautiful description of hu-
 man-nature, and a strong evidence of the goodness of
 its Author: But do Men act as if they had such an in-
 nate love for Virtue, or such a benevolent disposition?

A. AN execrable Superstition has in many Christian
 countries, in a manner, extinguish'd these kind senti-
 ments, and even all humanity and pity; insomuch
 that the tender Sex can rejoice to hear the shrieks,
 and see the agonies of Men expiring under the most
 cruel tortures; and there's scarce any place, so much
 does this cursed bigotry prevail, where we do not al-
 most daily see too much reason to cry,

Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum.

THE Noble Author now quoted justly observes,

„ * If there be a Religion that teaches the adoration
 „ & love of a God, whose character it is to be cap-
 „ tious, and of high resentment, subject to wrath &
 „ anger, furious, revengeful, and revenging himself,
 „ when offended, on others than those who gave the
 „ offence; and if there be added to the character of
 „ this God, a fraudulent disposition, encouraging deceit
 „ and treachery among Men; favourable to a few,
 „ tho' for slight causes, & cruel to the rest; 'tis evident
 „ that such a Religion as this being strongly enforc'd,
 „ must

* *Characterisf. Vol. 2. pag. 48.*

must of necessity raise even an approbation & respect towards the vices of this kind, & breed a suitable disposition, a capricious, partial, revengeful, & deceitful temper. For even *irregularities & enormities* of a heinous kind must in many cases appear illustrious to one, who considers them in a Being admir'd & contemplated with the highest honour & veneration. - * Whensoever, therefore, a Religion teaches the love and admiration of a Deity, that has any apparent character of *ill*; it teaches at the same time a love and admiration of *that ill*, & causes that to be taken for good & amiable, which is in itself horrid & detestable.

ARCHBISHOP Tillotson, than whom none better understood human nature, says, that † „According as Mens notions of God are, such will their Religion be; if they have gross & false conceptions of God, their Religion will be absurd and superstitious: If Men fancy God to be an ill-natur'd being, arm'd with infinite power, who takes delight in the misery and ruin of his Creatures, and is ready to take all advantages against them, they may fear him, but they will hate him; & they will be apt to be such towards one another, as they fancy God to be towards them: for all Religion doth naturally incline Men to imitate him whom they worship.

Dr. Scot, to root out all such injurious notions as derogate from the goodness of God, very justly observes, that ‡ „God being infinitely good in his own nature, it is impossible we shou'd conceive him to be better than he is; & therefore every false notion we entertain of his goodness, must detract from it; and so much as we detract from his goodness, so much we detract from the principal reason & motive of our loving him.

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AND

* *Characteris. Vol. 2. pag. 47.*

† *Serm. Vol. 1. pag. 181. & To. 1. pag. 63.*

‡ *Christ. Life. P. 2. Vol. 1. pag. 326.*

AND indeed, power & knowledge of themselves can't engage our loves: if they cou'd, we shou'd love the Devil in proportion to his power and knowledge. 'Tis goodness alone which can beget confidence, love, and veneration; and there's none of those questions, whether relating to God or Man; but what may be easily determined, by considering which side of the question carries with it the greatest goodness: since the same light of Nature, which shews us there is such a good Being, shews us also what such goodness expects. And did Men consider how repugnant 'tis to his goodness, to require any thing of them which they had no reason to obey, but because they had no power to disobey, they must abhor the notion of all arbitrary commands.

AND therefore, I shall not scruple to affirm; That he who stedfastly adheres to what the Light of Nature teaches him concerning the divine goodness, as he will avoid the comfortless prospect of the Atheist, * the perpetual anxiety of the Superstitious, the wild perturbation of the Enthusiast, and the pernicious fury of the Bigot; so he can't fail of the true Religion, happily seated in the middle between these extreams. And, as such a person can't but love God as he ought, so in imitation of the divine goodness, which influences all his actions, he will contribute his utmost to the good of others; and his love & kindness will be as extensive as Human-nature; and going on rational & evident principles, which must give him entire satisfaction, he will act a steady uniform part. And what can be wanting to a Man, who has this heavenly, this god-like disposition, which renders him happy in himself, & as far as it in his power, makes the whole World so too?

AND since 'tis not easy to part with a subject, which one can scarce think of without rapture, I must say,

* See *Plutarch* de Superstitione, Op. To. 2. p. 171. Edit. Francofurt.

say, that Men can never have true sentiments of the goodness of the divine Legislator, or esteem his Laws as they ought, till they are convinc'd he requires nothing of them but what is for their good; & that they can't but be miserable as long as they swerve from rules so essential to their happiness; & that the longer they do so, the more difficult will it be to acquire a contrary habit. These notions early inculcated, will cause Men with joy to obey the divine Laws, & make them in reality love God as well as he belov'd by him; who has the chief regard to the heart, and above all things requires the purity of the mind; and that Men shou'd act, not out of a principle of slavish fear, but from *perfect love void of all fear*.

Plutarch speaking of Religion, as it stood in the Heathen Church, & in his own time, represents it as full of satisfaction, hope, joy, and delight; and says, *
 „ It is plain, and evident from most demonstrable
 „ testimonies, that neither the societies, nor publick
 „ meetings in the Temples, nor any other diverting
 „ parties, fights, or entertainments are more delight-
 „ ful, or rejoicing, than what we ourselves behold,
 „ and practice in the Church worship. - - Our dis-
 „ position & temper is not on this occasion, as if we
 „ were in the presence of worldly Potentates, dread
 „ Sovereigns and despotick Princes; nor are we here
 „ found meanly humbling ourselves, crouching in
 „ fear & awe, and full of anxiety and confusion, as
 „ would be natural to us in such a case; but where
 „ the Divinity is esteem'd the *nearest*, and most im-
 „ mediately present, there horrors & amazement
 „ are the furthest banish'd; there the heart, we find,
 „ gives the freest way to pleasure, to entertainment
 „ - - and this even to excess. „ And,

* CHRISTIANS in addressing to the divine Majesty, must be fill'd with inexpressible joy & delight, did they

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con-

* Treatise 2g. *Epicurean Atheism*. To. 2. pag. 1104. D, E.

consider the true notion of God; „ Who, *as Arch-
 „ bishop Tillotson says*, * would appear to be so lo-
 „ vely a Being, so full of goodness and all desirable
 „ perfections, that even those who are of so irregular
 „ understanding, as not to believe there is a God,
 „ yet could not refrain from wishing with all their
 „ hearts there was one -- Who takes particular care
 „ of every one of us, & loves us; & delights to do
 „ us good. -- Who understands all our wants, & is
 „ able & willing to relieve us in our greatest straits.
 „ -- Is it not every Man's interest, that there should
 „ be such a Governor of the world as really designs
 „ our happiness, and has omitted nothing necessary
 „ to it: as governs us for our advantage, and will
 „ require nothing of us but what is for our good;
 „ & yet will infinitely reward us for doing of that
 „ which is best for ourselves; that will punish any
 „ Man that shall go about to injure us; or to deal
 „ otherwise with us than himself in like cases would
 „ be dealt withal. -- We have reason to believe God
 „ to be such a Being, if he be at all.

B. ARE not the last words too bold in supposing
 there could be no God, were he not such as he de-
 scribes him?

A. WITH Submission, I think not; since there can
 be nothing in God but what is God-like, he either
 must be perfectly good, or not be at all. It would
 be well, if all who in words give this character of the
 Deity, were consistent with themselves, and did not
 impute such actions to him, as make him resemble the
 worst of beings, & so run into downright *Demonism*.
 And let me add, Men of good sense, and who mean
 well, will naturally fall into the same sentiments;
 a *Shaftsbury* will say the same as a *Tillotson*.

„ IF there be, *says that Noble Author*, † a general
 „ Mind, it can have no particular interest: But the
 „ general good, and the good of the whole, and its

„ OWN

* *Te. i. p. 24.* † *Letter concerning Enthusiasm. p. 40, 41.*

own private good, must of necessity be one and the same. It can intend nothing besides, nor aim at any thing beyond, nor be provok'd to any thing contrary. So that we have only to consider, whether there be really such a thing as a *Mind that has relation to the whole*, or not. For, if unhappily there be no *Mind*, we may comfort ourselves, however, that Nature has *no malice*: If there be really a *MIND*, we may rest satisfy'd, that it is *the best natur'd one in the world*. The last case, one would imagine, shou'd be the most comfortable; & the notion of a *common Parent* less frightful than that of *forlorn Nature*, and a *fatherless World*. Tho' as Religion stands amongst us, there are many good people who wou'd have less fear in being thus expos'd, and wou'd be easier, perhaps, in their minds, if they were assur'd they had only mere *Chance* to trust to. For no body trembles to think there shou'd be *no God*, but rather, that there *shou'd be one*. This however wou'd be otherwise, if *Deity* were thought as kindly of as *Humanity*; and we could be persuaded to believe, that if there really was a *God*, *the highest Goodness*, must of necessity belong to him, without any of those defects of passion, those meannesses & imperfections, which we acknowledge such in ourselves; which, as good Men, we endeavour all we can to be superior to, and which, we find, we every day conquer as we grow better.

In recapitulating what I have said of the agreement of Natural & Reveal'd Religion, I can't do it more fully than in the words of Dr. *Sherlock* (now Bishop of *Banger*) who, in a Sermon for propagating the Gospel (where we may expect every thing which recommends it) says, * that „The Religion of the Gospel „is the *true original Religion of Reason and Nature*. — „That the doctrine of repentance, with which the „Gospel set out in the world, had reference to the

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„ *Law** *Serm. before the Society for Propag. the Gospel, p. 16. &c.*

„ *Law of Reason and Nature*, against which Men had
 „ every where offended; and since repentance infers
 „ the necessity of a future reformation, and a *return*
 „ to that duty and obedience, *from which*, by trans-
 „ gression we are fallen; the consequence is mani-
 „ festly this, that the *Gospel* was a *Republication of the*
 „ *Law of Nature*, and its *precepts declarative* of that
 „ *original Religion*, which was as old as the *Creation*.

„ THIS, continues he, will appear, by considering
 „ the nature of the thing itself. The *notions* of good
 „ and evil are eternally and unalterably the *same*;
 „ which notions are the rules & measures of all moral
 „ actions, and are consequently necessary, and con-
 „ stituent parts of Religion: And therefore, if the *Re-*
 „ *ligion of Nature* in her primitive state was *pure* and
 „ *uncorrupt*, which will not, I presume, be deny'd,
 „ tho' there was sufficient reason for a *Republication*
 „ of it, because of the great ignorance & Superstition
 „ which had grown upon the world, yet there cou'd
 „ be no reason for any *alteration* of it: For tho' the
 „ world was the worse for abusing the *Religion of Na-*
 „ *ture*, & might want to be reform'd by a divine in-
 „ structor, yet the *Religion of Nature* was not the worse
 „ for being abus'd, but *still* retain'd its first *purity* &
 „ *simpleness*. The duties of Religion, consider'd as the
 „ rules of action, flow from the relation we bear to
 „ God, and to one another; and Religion must ever
 „ be the same, as long as these relations continue un-
 „ alter'd. If our first Parent was the Creature of God,
 „ so are we; and whatever service & duty he ow'd
 „ in virtue of this dependance, the *same* is due from
 „ us: nor can this *relation* be ever made the ground
 „ of *different* duties in his case, & ours. If therefore,
 „ *Nature* rightly instructed him at first how to *serve*
 „ his Maker, our obligations being the same with his,
 „ our rule must be the *same* also. The case is the same
 „ with respect to the duties owing from Man to Man;
 „ and it would be as reasonable to suppose, that the

„ three

three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right ones in one age, & unequal in another, as to suppose, that the duties of Religion should differ in one age from what they were in another, the habits and relations from which they flow continuing always the same.

THAT the case is in fact what I have represented it to be, might be shewn from the particular Laws of the Gospel, and their dependance on the maxims & principles of *Natural Religion*. -- I will content myself with one general proof, which reaches to every part of the *Christian* doctrine. -- If the Law and the Prophets hang on these two grand commandments, *viz.* The Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour, then the Doctrine of our Saviour, which is the perfection of the Law & the Prophets, must hang on them likewise: Now, if you will allow, that the Love of God, & the Love of our Neighbour are *fundamentals* in the Law of Reason & Nature (as undoubtedly they are) you must also allow, that whatever may be deduc'd from them by rational consequence, must be a *Precept* of the Law of Nature. Whatever, therefore, hangs on these two Commandments, must necessarily be a part of *Natural Religion*; & that all the Law & the Prophets do so hang, and consequently, the Doctrine of the Gospel, which is the perfection of them, you have had our Saviour's express testimony. Since then it appears (as I think) that the Religion of the Gospel is the true original Religion of Reason & Nature; -- That it has, as such, a claim to be receiv'd independent of those Miracles, which were wrought for its confirmation, will be admitted by all, who allow the force & obligation of *Natural Religion*; & can be deny'd by none who know, or understand themselves. The principles of Religion are interwoven with the very frame & make of our minds, & we may as well run from ourselves, as from the source of the obligations we are under.

B. BUT does not this Right Reverend Prelate in this Sermon affirm, that there are Doctrines in Christianity, which, tho' not different, yet are distinct from the Principles of Reason and Nature?

A. THERE'S nothing more common with learned Authors, than distinctions without any difference; yet the Bishop very cautiously words what he says, „ That the Doctrines of Christianity, tho' not different, „ are distinct from the principles of Reason & Nature; but he does not say they are distinct from those doctrines, which flow from the principles of Reason and Nature: And what he immediately adds, that „ Our Saviour came into the World to supply the „ defects, not of Religion, which continu'd in its „ purity & perfection, but of Nature; „ plainly shews, that he thinks nothing cou'd be added by our Saviour, to a Law that had no defects; and that the defects of Nature cou'd only be supply'd, by obliging people to live up to this natural Law of unchangeable purity & perfection.

THIS is doing justice to Reveal'd as well as Natural Religion, and shews the Author of both to be at all times equally wise, good, & beneficent; & the Bishop ought to be valu'd for speaking thus plainly.

O si sic omnia dixisset.

AND to this Right Reverend Father, I may add the Authority of the late Most Reverend Archbishop Sharp, who says, * „ That Religion (taking that word „ as it signifies that universal duty we owe to God, „ and by which we are to recommend ourselves to „ his favour) is not so variable, uncertain, & arbitrary „ a matter, as some Men do perhaps suppose it; but „ is a constant, fixed, permanent, immutable thing. „ The same now that it was in the days of the old „ Law; and the same then that it was in the days „ before the Law was given; & the same both then „ and now that it shall be a thousand years hence, „ if

„ if the World should last so long. True Religion,
 „ and that which is from God, was, & is, and ever
 „ will be the same in substance in all Countries, and
 „ in all Nations, & among all sorts & conditions of
 „ Men whatsoever; and the sum of it is, *To love the*
 „ *Lord our God with all our hearts; and with all our*
 „ *minds, and with all our strength; and next to that,*
 „ *To love our Neighbour as ourselves.* This was the
 „ Religion that the Patriarchs, and all the pious Men
 „ of old lived in, and by which they obtained God's
 „ favour and acceptance, when as yet there was no
 „ reveal'd instituted Religion in the world. -- That
 „ this is the sum of the Christian Religion, no Man
 „ can in the least doubt that has ever read the New-
 „ Testament. -- In our Saviour's institution there is
 „ hardly any one thing recommended to us, that doth
 „ not directly relate to this matter; that is not either
 „ an instance wherein we are to express our love to
 „ God, & our Neighbour, or a means whereby we
 „ may be furthered in the practising of those duties,
 „ or an argument, & motive, & encouragement to
 „ excite us to the practising of them. It is the design
 „ of all his Doctrines to give us right notions of God,
 „ and our Neighbour; to teach us how excellent,
 „ how good God is in himself, and how kind, how
 „ gracious to us, and therefore, what infinite reason
 „ we have to love, and serve him, and to love and
 „ serve all Mankind (who are our Neighbours) for
 „ his sake. --

„ We have an easy, & a true notion of that Reli-
 „ gion which is from God, and we can never be at
 „ a loss to find out in what it doth consist; it is not
 „ a thing to be alter'd at pleasure; both the Law of
 „ Nature, and the Law of God; both the natural
 „ dispensation under which all Men are born, & the
 „ reveal'd dispensation as we have either in the Old
 „ or New Testament, do sufficiently instruct us in the
 „ main heads of it. Nay, I dare be bold to say,

„ so long as Mankind do retain their nature, & are
 „ not transform'd into another sort of creatures than
 „ what God made them at first, it is impossible that
 „ there should be any true Religion, but what may
 „ be summed up in these two things; to love God,
 „ and our Neighbour.

C H A P. VIII.

*That the not adhering to those notions Reason dic-
 tates concerning the Nature of God, has been
 the occasion of all Superstition, & of all those
 innumerable mischiefs, that Mankind, on the
 account of Religion, have done either to them-
 selves, or to one another.*

HAVING in general shewn the absurdity of not
 being govern'd by the reason of things in all
 matters of Religion, I shall now in particular, shew
 the fatal consequences of not adhering to those notions
 Reason dictates concerning the nature of God.

Charron, tho' a Priest of that Church which abounds
 with superstition, the most pernicious as well as absurd,
 seems to have a right notion of Superstition as well
 as justly to abhor it, in saying, that * „ Superstition,
 „ and most other errors and defects in Religion, are,
 „ generally speaking, owing chiefly to want of be-
 „ coming, & right apprehensions of God: We debase,
 „ and bring him down to us, we compare, & judge
 „ him by ourselves, we cloath him with our infir-
 „ mities, and then proportion, and fit our fancy ac-
 „ cordingly. -- What horrid profanation and blas-
 „ phemy is this!

It is to this absurdity of debasing God, & cloathing
 him with our infirmities, and judging of him by our-
 selves,

Charron of Wisdom, Eng. Transl. pag. 131.

· selves, that the mediatory Gods amongst the Heathen owe their rise. Had they believ'd a supreme Being was every where, & at all times knew their thoughts, they could never have taken such a round-about way of addressing him, who not only knew what they desir'd, but their real wants, & what would relieve them better than any mediatory Beings whatever.

B. THEY address'd to mediatory Beings, to shew their greater respect to the supreme Being, and their own unworthiness to approach him.

A. THIS shews what unworthy notions they had of the supreme Being, since it would be an affront even to a temporal Prince, if he was present, & heard every thing you said, not to address to him, but to another, to let the Prince know what you wanted from him.

THE Heathens must think, if they thought at all, that those mediatory Gods could either suggest to the supreme God some reasons he before was ignorant of, or that by their importunities they could prevail on his weakness, to do what otherwise he was not willing to do.

THIS Heathen notion, as it suppos'd the supreme God either ignorant or weak, so it made the mediatory Gods to have a greater kindness for, & readiness to do good to Mankind, and that their solicitations made him better-natur'd than otherwise he would be: This of course took off their love from the Supreme, and plac'd it on those mediatory Gods, upon whose powerful intercessions they so much depended. However, these Heathens, allowing one, & but one Most High God, did not so far derogate from the honour of the one true God, as to pretend that the most distinguished among their several Mediators was equal to him, *equality* and *mediation* being as inconsistent as *equality* & *supremacy*: And they would have made their Religion an errant jumble, if they had worshipp'd these Gods sometimes as Mediators only,

some-

sometimes as sovereign disposers of things, & sometimes as both together.

HAD the Heathens believ'd God to have been a purely-spiritual, invisible Being, they cou'd never have suppos'd him visible to mortals, or have thought that an unlimited Being cou'd appear under the limited form of a Man, or other animal; or that an omnipresent Being cou'd any more be present in one place, or creature, than another; or that such a Being cou'd be confin'd to a small spot of earth, while another equally omnipresent was in Heaven, and a third descending from thence, &c. Or that one God cou'd be sent on the errand of another God, after the manner that God *Mercury* was by God *Jupiter*: tho' there was nothing too absurd for the Heathens to believe, after they had destroy'd the unity of God, except it was, that *Jupiter* & *Mercury*, the *Sender* and the *Sent* were the same God.

The primitive Fathers bitterly inveigh'd against these heathenish Notions: *Iustin Martyr* for instance says, *
 „ None, who have the least sense, will dare to affirm,
 „ that the Maker & Father of the Universe did appear
 „ in a small spot of earth; the God of the Universe
 „ can neither ascend, nor descend, or come into any
 „ place. *Tertullian* says, † He wou'd not believe the
 „ sovereign God descended into the womb of a
 „ Woman, tho' even the Scripture itself should say it.
 'Tis impossible, says *Eusebius*, ‡ „ that the eyes of
 „ Mortals should ever see the supreme God; viz.
 „ Him, who is above all things, & whose essence is
 „ unbegotten & immutable. Again, § 'Tis absurd,
 „ and contrary to all Reason, that the unbegotten &
 „ immutable nature of the Almighty God should take
 „ the form of a Man; or that the Scripture should
 „ forge

* *Iustin Oper.* p. 207. Ed. 1593. Al. p. 283. B. p. 356. E.
 † *Adv. Prax.* c. 16. ‡ *Demon. Evan.* l. 5. c. 20. p. 248.
 § *Eccles. Hist.* l. 1. c. 2. pag. 6. C.

„ forge such-like falsties. *Minutius Felix* in his Apology says, * „ That the Deity can't dye, nor can any „ thing which is born be a God: That only is divine, „ which has neither beginning nor end: If the Gods „ get Children, they would get them immortal: We „ must conclude those Gods to be Men, of whose „ birth & burial we are fully satisfy'd., Thus the Fathers expos'd the Pagan *Polytheism*.

A great deal more, as you may well imagine, might be said on this head; but now I shall briefly consider what pernicious effects the having wrong & unnatural conceptions of the Deity, has occasion'd among Men with relation to themselves, & one another.

If we take a general view of those mischiefs Mankind have at all times practis'd on a religious account, either upon themselves or others, we shall find them owing to their entertaining such notions of God, as are intirely inconsistent with his nature, and contrary to what their Reason, if attended to, wou'd inform them of the Design & End of the Laws of God.

HAD not numbers in all ages thought, that God delighted in the pain and misery of his Creatures, they cou'd never have imagin'd, that the best way to render them acceptable to him, was by tormenting themselves with immoderate watchings, fastings, penances, and mortifications of all sorts; & the greater the more pleasing. And even at present there are among *Christians*, *Mahometans*, and *Pagans*, numbers of Men who devote themselves to exercises full of pain & corporal sufferings, and either wound, or mangle their own persons, or find other ways of tormenting themselves: & indeed, the Superstitious every where think, the less mercy they shew to their bodies, the more mercy God will shew to their souls.

MANY of the primitive Christians, instead of flying, as the Gospel directs, not only ran voluntarily to execution, but provok'd their judges to do them that favour.

And

And under *Trajan*, all the Christians in a City in *Asia* came in a body to the Proconsul, & offer'd themselves to the slaughter; which made him cry, * *O! ye unhappy People, if ye have a mind to dye, have ye not halters and precipices enough to end your lives, but ye must come here for Executioners.* This was a general practice under the *Antonini*; † & *Marcus Antoninus* severely reflects on the obstinacy of the Christians, in thus running headlong to death. And *St. Cyprian* labours to comfort those who might be so unhappy, by the ceasing of the then Persecution, to miss the Crown of Martyrdom: tho' one wou'd think there were but few who wanted this consolation; since he says, *Many of the Clergy, & the far greater part of the Laity apostatiz'd.* But when by the Empire's becoming Christian, the Crown of Martyrdom was no longer to be obtain'd by the prevailing party of Christians, then exercising cruelties on themselves was esteem'd the next best thing; & many Devotees put monstrous hardships on themselves; while others chose poverty, rags, & nastiness; or else retir'd to caves, deserts, and other solitary places to sigh away their miserable lives. And Ecclesiastick History is full of Miracles done by such Madmen as *Simon Stylites*, who had no other dwelling than a pillar; on which he spent the best part of his life; and 'twas owing to these superstitious notions, that such numbers of *Monasteries* & *Nunneries* were soon founded to the great oppression & depopulation of the Christian World: not but that the impudent Forgeries of *Athanasius*, ‡ & other such like Saints about Miracles done by

* *Tertul. ad Scap. cap. 5. pag. 11.*

† See *Marc. Antonin. de rebus suis, lib. 11. cap. 3.*
And *Lucian de morte Peregrin. To. 2. p. 567, 568.*
And *Arrian. Epist. l. 4. c. 7. p. 500. Edit. Cantab.*
Le Clerk's Life of Cyp. Bib. Un. To. 12. p. 248, 249.
Ep. 14. p. 31. Edit. Oxon.

‡ See *Athanasius's Life of Anthony the Monk, To. 2. p. 455. A & d. Jerom of the Mirac. of Paul & Hilarion two Monks, To. 1. p. 237. & d. & p. 241, & d.*

by *Astors*, help'd to increase this superstition; whilst the *Priests*, tho' they encourag'd those severities on others, were far from practising any on themselves.

Had such notions been adher'd to concerning the divine Goodness, as the Light of Nature dictates, the *Egyptians*, and some other Pagan Nations cou'd never have thought that cutting off the foreskin (not to be perform'd without great pain & hazard) cou'd have been esteem'd a religious duty acceptable to a good & gracious God; who makes nothing in vain, much less what requires the cutting off, even with extream danger as well as anguish. Had Nature requir'd such an operation, Nature, being always the same, wou'd still have requir'd it.

THIS Institution, as is prov'd by *Marsham*, * and others, seems to be owing to the *Egyptians*, who thought all to be profane who us'd it not: & it was after *Abraham* had been in *Egypt*, that Circumcision was instituted: in order, 'tis likely, to recommend his Posterity to the *Egyptians*, on whom they were for some ages to depend: and what makes this the more probable, is, that 'twas not till after the Lord had order'd *Moses* into *Egypt*, that † the Lord met him by the way in the Inn, and sought to kill him for not circumcising his Son. And upon *Jeshua's* circumcising the *Israelites* (Circumcision not being observ'd during their stay in the wilderness, when they had no communication with *Egypt*) the Lord himself says, ‡ This day have I rid'd away the reproach of *Egypt* from off you.

THE Heathen World must have very gross conceptions, not only of their inferior Gods, but of the Father of Gods and Men; when they imagined him of so cruel a nature, as to be delighted with the butchering of innocent animals; and that the stench of burnt flesh shou'd be such a sweet-smelling savour in his nostrils, as to atone for the wickedness of Men: and wicked

* *Cons. Chron.* p. 73. & d. Edit. *Francos.*

† *Exod.* 4. 24. ‡ *Josb.* 5. 2-9.

wicked, no doubt, they were, when they had such an atonement at hand. So that the *harmless* were burnt to save the *hurtful*; and Men, the less *innocent* they grew, the more they destroy'd the innocent beasts.

Non Bove mactato Cælestia Numina gaudent;

Sed, quæ præstanda est, & sine reſte, Fide.

Ovid. Epist. p. 29. Ep. 20. v. 187.

If the *Pagans* believ'd beasts were not given them for food, why did they eat them? Or, if they thought they were, why did they ungratefully throw back the gifts of God on the donor? Or, why did they not drown, or bury them, rather than make such a stench in burning them, as many times by the number of Sacrifices, might infect the very air?

'Tis probable, that the Heathen Priests who shar'd with their Gods, and reserv'd the best bits for themselves, had the chief hand in this as well as in all other gainful superstitions; while the deluded People, who many times suffer'd by the scarcity of provisions, caus'd by the great number of Sacrifices, were at vast expence in maintaining these holy butchers, whose very trade inspir'd them with cruelty.

And 'tis probable, this absurd notion prevail'd like all other absurdities by degrees, and at first Sacrifices were only religious Feasts, either in commemoration of some national benefit, where after God, their great benefactor, was celebrated, they commemorated their particular benefactors; or else Feasts were made on a private account by the Master of a Family, upon shearing his Sheep, gathering in the fruits of the Earth, &c. where those that assist'd him were entertained, & joyfully join'd in giving thanks to the Author of those blessings, without destroying, or burning any part of the creature given for their use; and the Master of the Family was, no doubt, Master of the Ceremonies at his own Feast: But this simple method not pleasing certain Persons, who were resolv'd to have the best

share

fare in all those religious Feasts, they perswaded the People that it was necessary some part of the flesh of Animals, should be burnt to feed the hungry nostrils of the Deity, delighted with the sweet savour of burnt flesh; and the better part to be reserv'd unburnt for themselves, to whom the slaying of the animals, & the offering them up was appropriated. 'Tis then no wonder the number of the Gods multiply'd, since the more Gods, the more Sacrifices, and the Priests had better fare: and that they might not want plentiful feasting, the People were made to believe, that they cou'd learn their fortunes from the intrails of the beasts they sacrific'd; and this method continues to this day in those places, where they have not found out an easier and better way of cheating the People.

B. You seem to be of the sentiments of the Poet, who says,

*Natural Religion was easy first, and plain;
Tales made it mystery, offerings made it gain;
Sacrifices and shows were at length prepar'd,
The Priests eat roast meat, and the people star'd.*

A. THE Pagans sacrificing of beasts was not so bad in itself, as what it soon occasion'd, *human Sacrifices*; which, Men being of greater value than beasts, were believ'd to be more acceptable; and Parents, stifling all natural affections, offer'd up their own Children, as the most precious gifts they cou'd bestow on the Gods, except offering up their own lives, and sacrificing themselves. And as this Sacrifice was thought most meritorious, so the more excellent the Persons, the more agreeable the Sacrifice. And there are even at this day, a number of superstitious People in *India*, who out of great devotion throw themselves under the wheels of those heavy chariots, which carry the Images of their Gods, & are crush'd to death; & others, out of the same mistaken zeal, cut off their flesh, & mangle their limbs till they fall down dead; which

F. makes

makes the People rejoice at their sufferings, and reverence them as most holy Martyrs; concluding that nothing but the truth of their Religion cou'd enable them to shew such terrible marks of zeal on themselves, and become voluntary Martyrs.

B. I pity those deluded People, & wonder how Men can persuade themselves, that the mercy of Heaven can be purchas'd by such barbarities, as human-nature left to itself wou'd start at.

A. THAT the Priests were every where for human Sacrifices is no wonder; since they had the appointing the Men, whom the Gods did the great honour to accept for Burnt-offerings: And indeed, after People once gave themselves up to believe in their Priests, there was nothing too absurd to be receiv'd as divine. When the *Ethiopians*, for instance, were once persuaded that their Priests were intimately acquainted with the will of the Gods, it was too late to dispute any orders they pretended to bring from them; and therefore, their Kings as well as private persons, well-knowing that the commands of the Immortal Gods were not to be disputed by Mortals, * most religiously executed themselves as soon as the pleasure of the Gods was signify'd to them by those sacred Messengers of their will. And this blind-devotion might have continu'd till now, had not an Infidel Prince, bred up in the profane Philosophy of the *Greeks*, put a stop to it by surprising, & destroying at once all those holy Impostors.

WE learn from *Bernier* & others, that it has been an immemorial custom in *Indostan*, for the Women (so great a power has Superstition even over that fearful Sex) to burn themselves with their dead Husbands; adorn'd with all the incombustible riches they cou'd procure on their own account; or that the folly of others wou'd send by them to their dead friends: These their Priests secure to themselves, by telling

* *Diod. Sic. l. 3. p. 101. B, C, & d.*

the credulous people that the ashes of the dead, and all burnt with them, are too sacred to be touch'd by any but themselves.

B. THO' human Sacrifices obtain'd among the Heathen, yet sure the *Levitical* Law did not approve, or countenance any such practices.

A. A UTHORS are divided, & they who maintain the affirmative say, that the *Levitical* Law distinguishes between ordinary Vows, and those Vows where any thing is devoted to the Lord; and this they pretend is plain from *Levit* 27. where after many surprising things about common Vows, by which the things themselves, or money in lieu of them, were to be given to the Priest; at *Ver.* 28 it comes to things devoted, and says, *Notwithstanding, no devoted thing that a Man shall devote unto the Lord, of all that he hath, both of Men and Beasts, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeem'd; every thing devoted is most holy unto the Lord.* And what is meant by being most holy unto the Lord, is explain'd in the next verse, *None devoted, which shall be devoted of Man shall be redeem'd; but shall surely be put to death.* And they say it was before declar'd, that whatever was the Lord's, as the First-born of Man and Beast, was to be slain; if God did not order its redemption. * *The First-born of Man was to be redeem'd; and that of an Ass, if not redeem'd by a Lamb, was to have its neck broke; & the Captives taken in War, which fell to the Lord's share, there being no order for redeeming, were, as is own'd by all, to be slain.*

THE Prophet *Micah* reckons the putting every devoted thing to death among the *Hebrew* institutions, in saying, † *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, or bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleas'd with thousands of rams, or with ten thou-*

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* *Exod.* 30. 12, 13. & 34. 19, 20. † *Mic.* 6. 6. to 8.

thousand of rivers of oil? Shall I give my First-born for my transgression; the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath stewed thee, O Man; what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justly, & to love mercy, & to walk humbly with thy God?

HERE the sacrificing of a Man's own Children is mention'd equally with the sacrificing of beasts, which is allow'd to be a *Jewish* institution: how absurdly must the Prophet be suppos'd to have argu'd, after he hath preferr'd Justice & Mercy to a thing commanded by God, if he shou'd go on to prefer it before a thing abhorr'd by God!

If there cou'd be any doubt in this matter, *Jephtha's* Vow wou'd clear it up: for this *Jewish* Hero made the Vow when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, & after making it he wrought a great deliverance for *Israel*. The words of the Vow are, *Whatsoever (or rather Whosoever) cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the Children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's; and I will offer it up to him for a burnt-offering.* A Vow made by such an extraordinary person, and upon such an extraordinary occasion, looks as tho' something extraordinarily pleasing to God, was design'd by that Vow; which, tho' domestick animals might have been sacrific'd, must relate to persons capable of acting with design; viz. of coming out of his house to meet him after the victory; which to his great grief his only Child did. Had there been any way of dispensing with this solemn Vow, he, since he had two month's time to consider, wou'd, no doubt, have found it out; but he says, *I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, & I cannot go back;* and he did with her according to his Vow. And his Daughter, worthy of a better fate, was willing her Father shou'd execute his cruel Vow, only regretting that she dy'd without being a Mother in *Israel*: for that reason she was yearly mourn'd by the Daughters of *Israel*.

ST. *Jerome*, as well as the Author of the *Questions to the Orthodox*, * thinks that *Jephtha's* piety in sacrificing his Daughter, was the reason of St. *Paul's* numbring him among the just persons. And,

BISHOP *Smalridge*, in his Sermon about *Jephtha's* Vow, says, „ That all the Fathers, as well as our own *Homilies*, own that he sacrific'd his Daughter.

THE *Jews* cou'd not think it absolutely unlawful for a Father to sacrifice an innocent Child; since *Abraham* was highly extoll'd for being ready to sacrifice his only Son, and that too without the least expostulation: tho' he was importunate with God to save an inhospitable, idolatrous, and incestuous City.

No wonder that a single person in the power of another might be devoted to God, since free, & independent Nations were so devoted; & it was by virtue of such a Vow, which *Israel* vowed unto the Lord, that the *Canaanites*, who had never done *Israel* the least injury, † Men, Women, and Children were to be utterly destroy'd.

HAD the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, ‡ who reckons *Jephtha* among the *Jewish* Heroes, thought the *Jews* abhor'd all human Sacrifices, he wou'd not, at least, without some apology for the lawfulness of human Sacrifices, have declar'd one such Sacrifice, where the same person was both Sacrificer & Sacrifice, to have been of infinite value, in saying, that *Christ* offer'd up himself; § and that He put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself; ¶ and endeavours to shew the *Hebrews*, that the blood of the beasts that were sacrific'd was of no value in comparison of ✠ the blood of *Christ*, who, thro' the eternal Spirit, offer'd up himself without spot to God. *

F. 3

B. AD-

* Ep. to *Julian*. To. 1. p. 208. *Justin's* Oper. f. 454, A, 455. C.

† Numb. 21. 2, 3. ‡ Chap. 11. 32.

§ Heb. 7. 27. ¶ 9. 26. ✠ Ver. 13. * Ver. 14.

B. ADMITTING the *Jewish* Law allow'd human Sacrifices; yet the Christian Religion; sure, forbids (since *Christ*, according to the Apostle, *sacrific'd himself*) all human sacrifices:

A. If putting innocent, and conscientious Men to death on account of Religion, may be call'd *sacrificing* them, there have been more human Sacrifices than ever were before in the world, & those too not offer'd up to God, but to the Devil, by burning their bodies, and sentencing their souls to Hell. And even at this day the *Papists* to persuade the Spectators, that those they condemn to the flames immediately go to Hell, dress them up in a *San-benito*, or a coat painted all over with flames and Devils; and then take their leave of each sufferer with this charitable expression, *Jam animam suam tradimus Diabolo*.

B. I must own, this bigotry, which has had such terrible effects among Christians, was little felt, or known in the *Pagan* world.

A. Is not this cursed bigotry owing to the most unworthy notions bigots have entertain'd of the divine perfections, imagining they do service to the Creator, by hurting, and destroying his Creatures? The fiery zeal of such wretches is capable of any mischief: Most other Men, tho' ever so wicked, have some remains of pity and humanity, some checks of conscience, and tho' ever so much provok'd, time will assuage their anger: but the Bigot feels not the least remorse, nor can time abate his fury, & he is so far from having any pity, that he glories in the cruellest actions, & thinks the more hellish facts he commits, the more he merits Heaven: and very often gets the reputation of a Saint for acting the part of a Devil. So that his notions of God and Religion, serve only to make him infinitely a worse Man, than if he had been without any belief: for then he could have no motives from the next world for doing mischief; nor wou'd his disbelief strip him of his humanity, or hinder him,

him, if he judg'd rightly of his own interest; from acting so by his Fellow-Creatures, as, taking in the whole of his life, was best for him to do.

B. You represent bigotry more odious than it is, in making it worse than Atheism itself.

A. As Bigotry is the worst sort of Superstition, so you know the Philosophers in general suppose Superstition to be worse than Atheism itself. *Plutarch*, in particular, makes it his business in his Tract of *Disdemony*, or *Superstition*, * to prove that Atheism, tho' an opinion false, & even stupid, yet is far less hurtful to Men than Superstition; & reflects less dishonour on the Deity itself: For he interprets *Disdemony*, to be the † continual dread of a Deity no less mischievous than powerful; which is the most odious character that can belong to any intellectual Being; & has given birth to those shocking notions, & dismal rites in divine Worship, that have either run Men into Atheism, and expos'd Religion itself to ridicule & contempt; or made Mankind the dupe of designing knaves, and taught fierce bigots to exercise, and then sanctify the most inhuman barbarities.

„ THE Atheist, says he, ‡ knows no God at all; „ the Superstitious none but what is monstrous and „ terrible; mistaking for dreadful, what is most kind „ & beneficent; for tyrannical, what is truly paternal; „ for mischievously inclin'd, what is full of providential care; nay, for a Being brutally savage & fierce, „ what is meer Goodness itself. Shall then, adds he, § „ the Atheist be counted impious, & not this superstitious Person much more so? I, for my part, had „ rather Men should say there is no such Person as „ *Plutarch*, than that he is a Man inconstant, fickle, „ prone to anger, ¶ ready to revenge himself upon „ the slightest occasion, & full of indignation for meer „ trifles, &c. And yet this is no more than what the

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* To. 2. 165. B. Oc. † Pag. 171. A, B.

‡ Pag. 167. C, D. § P. 169. E, F. ¶ P. 170. D.

„ superstitious think of the Deity; whom of consequence they must as well hate as fear: They worship, indeed, & adore him; and so do Men even those very Tyrants they wou'd be glad of an opportunity to destroy. * The Atheist contributes not in the least to Superstition: but Superstition having given out so hideous an idea of the Deity, some have been frighted into the utter disbelief of any such Being; because they think it much better, nay, more reasonable, that there shou'd be no Deity, than one whom they see more reason to hate, & abominate, than to love, honour, and reverence. † Thus inconsiderate Men, shock'd at the deformity of Superstition, run directly into its opposite, extream *Atheism*, heedlessly skipping over true Piety, that is the golden mean between both. So much for this Philosopher of the *Gentiles*, I shall now quote a noble Christian Philosopher, who says, ‡ „ *Atheism* leaves a Man to sense, to Philosophy, to natural pity, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, tho' Religion were not; But Superstition dismounts all these, & erecteth an absolute Monarchy in the minds of Men. Therefore *Atheism* did never perturb States; for it makes Men wary of themselves, as looking no further; And we see the times inclining to *Atheism* (as the Time of *Augustus Caesar*) were civil times. But Superstition hath been the confusion of many States, & bringeth in a new *Primum Mobile*, that ravilherh all the Spheres of Government.

I grant that next to a real Bigot, an Atheist in masquerade may do most mischief; but then it is by hiding the Atheist, & personating the Bigot, & under colour of promoting Religion, advancing Priest-craft. And there are no small number of these Atheists, if what the famous *Scaliger* says is true, § *Quicumque Jesuita*

* Pag. 171. A, etc. † Ibid. E.

‡ Bacon's Essays, p. 96. § Scaligerana, p. 126.

sunt vel Ecclesiastici Romæ in honoribus vivunt. Athei sunt.
 And Men must have a great deal of charity to think better of any Protestant, whose pretended zeal carries him, contrary to the principles of his Religion, into persecuting measures.

HAD the Heathen distinguish'd themselves by *Cree*ds made out of spite to one another, & mutually persecuted each other about the worship of their Gods, they would soon have made the number of their *Votaries* as few as the Gods they worshipp'd; but we don't find (except in *Egypt* that motherland of Superstition) they ever quarrell'd about their Gods; tho' their Gods sometimes quarrell'd, and fought about their *Votaries*: No, it was a Maxim with them, *Deorum injuriæ, Diis curæ.*

By the universal liberty that was allow'd amongst the Ancients, * „ Matters (as a noble Author observes) „ were so ballanc'd, that Reason had fair play; Learning, and Science flourish'd; wonderfull was the „ harmony & temper, which arose from these contradictions. Thus Superstition, & Enthusiasm were „ mildly treated; and being let alone, they never „ rag'd to that degree as to occasion bloodshed, wars, „ persecutions, and devastations: but a new sort of „ policy, — has made us leap the bounds of natural „ Humanity, and out of a super-natural Charity, has „ taught us the way of plaguing one another most „ devoutly. It has rais'd an antipathy, that no temporal interest could ever do, and entail'd on us a „ mutual hatred to all eternity. † And savage zeal, „ with meek and pious semblance, works dreadful „ massacre; & for Heaven's sake (horrid pretence) „ makes desolate the Earth.

AND as this noble Author observes, ‡ „ The *Zelus* „ *Æneæ*, (or the *Jupiter* of Strangers) was, among „ the Ancients, one of the solemn characters of Divinity,

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* Letter of Enthusiasm. p. 18. al. 28, 29. † Ib. 388.

‡ Characterist. Vol. 3. pag. 153, 154.

„ vinity, the peculiar attribute of the supreme Deity;
 „ benign to Mankind, and recommending universal
 „ love, mutual kindness and benignity between the
 „ remotest, & most unlike of human race. Such was
 „ the ancient Heathen Charity, & pious duty towards
 „ the whole of Mankind, both those of different
 „ nations & different worship.

BUT, good God! how different a character do
 Bigots give us of the Deity, making him an unjust,
 cruel, and inconsistent Being; requiring all Men to
 judge for themselves, and act according to their con-
 sciences, and yet authorising some among them to
 judge for others, and to punish them for not acting
 according to the consciences of those Judges, tho' ever
 so much against their own.

THESE Bigots thought they were authoris'd to
 punish all those that differ with them in their religious
 worship, as God's Enemies; but had they consider'd,
 that God alone cou'd discern Mens hearts, and alone
 discover whether any, by conscientiously offering him
 a wrong worship, cou'd become his Enemies; & that
 infinite Wisdom best knew how to proportion the
 punishment to the fault, as well as infinite power how
 to inflict it; they wou'd, surely, have left it to God
 to judge for himself, in a cause which immediately
 related to himself; and where they were not so much
 as parties concern'd, and as likely to be mistaken as
 those they wou'd punish. Can one, without horror,
 think of Mens breaking through all the rules of doing
 as they wou'd be done unto, in order to set themselves
 up for standards of truth for God as well as Man?
 Do not these impious wretches suppose, that God is
 not able to judge for himself; at least, not able to
 execute his own judgment? And that therefore, he
 has recourse, forsooth, to their superior knowledge or
 power; & they are to revenge his injuries, root out
 his Enemies, & restore his lost Honour, tho' with the
 destruction of the better part of Mankind? But,

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AS THE CREATION. CHAP. VIII. 91

To do the Propagators of these blasphemous notions justice, they do not throw this load of scandal on the *Law of Nature*, or so much as pretend from thence to authorise their execrable principles; but endeavour to support them by Traditional Religion, especially by misinterpreted texts from the Old Testament; & thereby make, not only Natural & Reveal'd Religion, but the Old & New Testament (the latter of which requires doing good both to *Jews & Gentiles*) contradict each other. But to return.

If what the Light of Nature teaches us concerning the divine perfections, when duly attended to, is not only sufficient to hinder us from falling into Superstition of any kind whatever, but, as I have already shown, demonstrates what God, from his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, can, or cannot command; how is it possible that the Law of Nature and Grace can differ? How can it be conceiv'd, that God's Laws, whether internally, or externally reveal'd, are not at all times the same, when the Author of them is, and has been immutably the same for ever.

CHAP. IX.

Human Happiness being the ultimate design & end of all Traditional, as well as Original Revelation, they must both prescribe the same means; since those means, which at one time promote human happiness, equally promote it at all times.

SHOULD I grant you, that Natural & Reveal'd Religion, as they have the same Author, must have the same ends; & that the ultimate end of all God's Laws, and consequently, of all Religion, is human happiness; yet there are several things to be consider'd as subordinate ends: And here, may not Original and Tra-

Traditional Religion differ? since 'tis allow'd by all, that how immutable soever these subordinate ends are, yet the means to promote these ends are various and mutable.

A. Your allowing these means to be various & mutable, supposes no such means so prescrib'd in the Gospel; but that, agreeably to the Law of Nature, they are to be vary'd as best suits that end for which they were ordain'd: To imagine the contrary, is to make things, dependent on circumstances, independent; things that are proper only under some circumstances, necessary under all circumstances; nay, to make ends mutable, and means immutable; and that these are to continue the same, tho' by change of circumstances they become prejudicial, nay, destructive to the end for which alone they were ordain'd. The mere necessary any *End* is, there's the more reason for people to be left at liberty to consider in the vast variety of circumstances, and those too perpetually changing, what means may be most proper for obtaining that End; since these having no worth in themselves, can only be valu'd according as they more or less conduce to the purpose they were intended for: & where God does not interpose, it is incumbent on human discretion, chiefly ordain'd for this end, to make such alterations as the reason of things requires.

DID not God always employ the most fit & most suitable means, he wou'd act contrary to the rules prescrib'd him by his own unerring Reason; & so he wou'd, did he not leave men at liberty to use such means, as their Reason, given for that purpose, told them was fittest to be used, in all those circumstances in which he had plac'd them; because that wou'd be requiring of them a conduct contrary to his own, & consequently, a conduct highly irrational: And therefore to alter one's conduct, as circumstances alter, is not only an act of the greatest prudence & judgment, but is consistent with the greatest steadiness.

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As far as Divine Wisdom excels human, so far the divine Laws must excel human Laws in clearness & perspicuity, as well as other perfections. Whatever is confus'd and perplex'd, can never come from the clear fountain of all knowledge, nor that which is obscure from the Father of inexhaustible Light: & as far as you suppose God's Laws are not plain to any part of Mankind, so far you derogate from the perfection of those Laws, & the wisdom, & the goodness of the divine Legislator; who, since he has the framing of the understanding of those to whom he dictates his Laws, can't but adapt one to the other. But how can we say that infinite Wisdom speaks plainly to Mankind thro' all generations, except we allow that his commands extend not beyond moral things; and that in all matters of a mutable nature, which can only be consider'd as means, he obliges them to act according as they judge most proper for bringing about those ends.

UPON any other *Hypothesis*, human Laws have vastly the advantage of the divine; as being publish'd in the language the Subjects understand, in a plain simple style, without any allegorical, metaphorical, hyperbolical, or other forc'd way of expression: & if time discovers any inconvenience, or any unforeseen difficulties want to be clear'd-up, the Legislature is ready at hand; or if in the mean time, any doubts about interpreting the Laws arise, there are standing Judges (accountable to the Legislature) in whose determinations people are to acquiesce. But Mankind are not to expect, that the divine Legislator will, from time to time, make any change in his Laws, & communicate them to all Nations in the languages they understand: nor can there be any Judges with a power to oblige people by their determinations; because such a power being without any appeal, is the same as a power to make divine Laws: & consequently, the only Tribunal God has erected here on Earth

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(distinct from that he has mediately appointed by Men for their mutual defence) is every Man's own Conscience; which, as it can't but tell him, that God is the Author of all things, so it must inform him, that whatever he finds himself oblig'd to do by the circumstances he is in, he is oblig'd by God himself, who has disposed things in that order, and plac'd him in those circumstances. 'Tis for want of observing this rule, that the divine writings are render'd so obscure; and the infinity of Sermons, Notes, Comments & Paraphrases, which pretend to speak plainer than God himself, have encreas'd this obscurity. If whatever tends to the honour of God, & good of Man, is evident from the Light of Nature, whence comes all this uncertainty, perplexity, doubts & difficulties? Is it not chiefly owing to the denying people that liberty, which God, out of his infinite goodness, has allow'd them by the Law of Nature; & hindring them from judging for themselves of the means, which best tend to promote this end; and imposing on them, by the terrors of temporal & eternal punishment, such needless speculations and useless observances, as can't be consider'd either as means or ends?

B. You know that Divines, tho' they can't deny what you say to be true in general, yet they think there's an exception as to Church-matters; and that here Men are not permitted to use such means as they themselves think best, but such only as those, who set up to be their *Spiritual Governors*, shall appoint.

A. NOTHING can be more absurd, than to suppose God has taken this power from the people, who have an interest to preserve Religion in its purity (every deviation from it being to their prejudice) & plac'd it unecontroulably in the hands of Men, who, having an interest in corrupting it, do, generally speaking, so manage matters, as if Religion was the means, and their power the end for which it was instituted. We do not find, that the *Mahometan* Clergy

cause any confision or disorder among the *Musselmén*, & the *Pagan* Priests are scarce taken notice of in Story, so little mischief did they do; while all *Church-History* is full of the vilest, and most pernicious things perpetrated by *Christian* Priests. The Christian Morals, you must own, are too pure and plain to cause this difference; what then can it be imputed to but that independent power, which those Priests usurp'd? which, tho' they claim'd it as deriv'd from Heaven for promoting godly Discipline, has occasion'd general disorder & confusion. Endless have been the quarrels ambitious Priests have had with Princes upon the account of this Power, to the stopping of justice, and subversion of almost all civil polity. Nor have the Ecclesiasticks been less embroil'd among themselves, each Set striving to engross a Power which can belong to no Mortal. And the Bishops, when they had no others to contend with, have ever contended among themselves about *Superiority*, the *rights of their Sees*, and the *limits of their Jurisdiction*: and when their choice depended on the People, they frequently, especially in their contentions about the greater Sees, run things on to blood & slaughter. And I appeal to their own Historians, whether the Ecclesiasticks ever scrupl'd any means to obtain this Power: & whenever they got it, whether an insupportable tyranny over body and mind, with the utter ruin of Religion, was not the consequence? And whether it had not, where exercis'd to the height, more fatal effects than all the Superstition of the *Gentiles*? Look the world round, you shall every where find Men more or less miserable, as they have been more or less debarr'd the right of acting according to the best of their understanding in matters relating to Religion.

While every Church, or Congregation of Christians, as in the Apostolical days, chose, & maintain'd their own Ministers, and order'd among themselves whatever requir'd a special determination, no incon-

veniences happen'd; but as soon as this simple and natural method was broke, & the Clergy were form'd into a closely-united body, with that subordination & dependance they had on one another, the Christian world was enslav'd, and Religion forc'd to give way to destructive Superstition.

WHICH could never have happen'd, if the Christians had observ'd these general rules, obligatory by the Light of Nature, as well as the Gospel; & which are alike given to every Christian; & oblige one as well as another; such as, „Doing all things for the honour of God; for edification, for order, for decency; for fleeing false Teachers, seducers, deceivers; for avoiding scandal, & offending weak brethren, &c., And here since every one must judge for himself; & can't make over this right to any other, must not all Church-matters be manag'd by common consent?

IN a word, If we consider the infinite variety of circumstances, the different manners & customs that prevail in different places, the prejudices of the weak, ignorant, and superstitious, and the designs of ambitious Men, there's nothing of a mutable nature, if once esteem'd immutably fix'd by God, but must sometimes become prejudicial to the end 'twas intended to promote; especially in a Religion design'd to be extended over the whole World, as well as to last to the end of it. There are but two ways of avoiding this inconvenience; either to suppose that the Founder of this Religion will, from time to time, himself ordain such alterations in things of a mutable nature, as those circumstances, which are different in different places, do require; or else, that he has left the parties concern'd, to act in all places according to discretion in such mutable matters.

B. You labour this point, but there are few of your sentiment.

A. I

2. If you mean Ecclesiasticks, perhaps you are in the right; tho' I'm sure, I have the Church of *England* on my side, if judicious *Hooker* may be allow'd to understand its Constitution, as well as the nature of *Ecclesiastical Polity*. He, in the tenth Section of his third Book, maintains this Proposition, that „ Neither „ God being the Author of Laws, nor his committing them to Scripture, nor the continuance of the „ end for which they were instituted, is reason sufficient to prove they are unchangeable: „ Where he admirably well distinguishes between things in their own nature immutable, & matters of outward order & polity, which he supposes daily changeable: & says, „ The nature of every Law must be judg'd by the „ end for which it was made, and by the aptness of the thing therein prescrib'd to the same end. -- „ When a thing does cease to be available to the end which gave it being, the continuance of it must appear superfluous. -- That which the necessity of some special time doth cause to be enjoin'd, binds no longer than that time, but does afterwards become free. Laws, tho' both ordain'd of God himself, & the ends for which they were ordain'd continuing, may notwithstanding cease, if by alteration of time, or persons, they are found insufficient to attain to that end. In which respect why may we not presume, that God doth even call for such a change or alteration, as the very nature of the things themselves doth make necessary? -- „ God never ordain'd any thing which could be better'd, yet many things he hath, that have been chang'd, and that for the better; that which succeedeth as better now, when change is requir'd, had been worse, when that which is now chang'd was instituted. -- In this case, Men do not presume to change God's ordinance, but yield thereunto, requiring itself to be chang'd. „ And he applies this reasoning honestly in saying, „ The best way

„ for us were to hold, even as they do, that in the
 „ Scripture there must needs be found some particular
 „ Form of Church-Polity, which God has instituted;
 „ and which, for that very cause belongeth to all
 „ Churches, to all times; but with any such partial
 „ eye to respect ourselves, and by cunning to make
 „ those things seem the truest, which are the fittest
 „ to serve our purpose, is a thing we neither like,
 „ nor mean to follow. „ And let me add, that most,
 if not all our Divines from the *Reformation* till the
 time of the *Laudean Faction*, were in the same sen-
 timents; & from the mutability of such things as are
 means to an end, prov'd there could be no particular
 Form of Church-Polity establish'd by divine autho-
 rity: And they argu'd from the example of good King
Hezekiah, who, without regard to the salutiferous virtue
 the *Brass Serpent* once had, broke it to pieces when
 perverted to a superstitious use. And,

ALL, who believe *means* in their own nature are
 mutable, must, if consistent with themselves, agree
 with Mr. *Hooker*. This is so very apparent, that nothing
 but interest can make any one talk otherwise; there-
 fore, I shall only quote the late Dean of *Canterbury*,
 who, in a Sermon preach'd before the University of
Cambridge, & publish'd at their request, says, * „ That
 „ the very temper, & composition of the Scripture
 „ is such, as necessarily refers us to some other Rule;
 „ for this is a system of mix'd, & very different duties,
 „ some of eternal & universal obligation, others oc-
 „ casional & particular, limited to times & circum-
 „ stances; and when these occasions & circumstances
 „ ceas'd, the matter of the command was lost, and
 „ the whole reason and force of it sunk of course:
 „ Now those things being oftentimes deliver'd pro-
 „ miscuously, & in general terms, Men must of ne-
 „ cessity have recourse to some other Rule to distin-
 „ guish, & guide them in making the just difference
 „ between the one, & the other sort.

AND

* *Serm. at the Commem. at Cambr. p. 12.*

AND what other Rule is there, by which we can distinguish rightly in this important matter, but what arises from the things themselves? Those which have an innate worth and goodness are of an eternal and universal obligation; others, which have no such worth, can be consider'd only as means occasionally accommodated to particular times, places, persons, and circumstances; which, of course, must cease to oblige, when they cease to conduce to the end for which they were appointed, or others become more conducive. And this will more fully appear, if we consider, as the above-mention'd Author observes, that * „ The circumstances of human life are infinite, and depend „ on a multitude of accidents not to be foreseen, & „ consequently not to be provided against. Hence „ Laws must run in general terms, & sometimes the „ intent of the Law is best fulfill'd by running contrary to the letter; & therefore, Reason & Honesty „ must guide us to the fitness of the thing, & a great „ scope must be left to Equity and Discretion. „ And surely, we must not suppose, that Reason, Honesty, Equity, and Discretion will teach us one thing, and the Traditional Law another; especially considering that in all God's Laws, 'tis the Reason of the Law that makes it Law.

B. BY the reasoning of such Divines, I can't perceive the use of any occasional Commands, since they suppose these can't oblige people longer than they judge it fit to observe them: otherwise there could be no difference between occasional and eternal Precepts; and what they judge fit & proper to be done, they are oblig'd to do without any occasional Commands; so that according to them, whether there are, or are not any occasional Commands, human Discretion is left at liberty to judge what is fit, or not fit to be observ'd; which, I think, is supposing all such Commands needless. Yet the Authors you quote suppose,

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pose, contrary to your *Hypothesis*, there have been such Commands; particularly in relation to the *Jewish* State.

A. THE *Jews*, taking the story to be literally true, being upon their coming out of *Egypt* a free People, had a right by the Law of Nature to choose what Government and Governor they pleas'd; and God would not act so inconsistent a part, as to deprive them of any of these rights he had given them by the Law of Nature; & therefore did not take upon him the civil administration of their affairs, till he had obtain'd their express consent: so that here he acted not as Governor of the Universe, but by a power deriv'd from the People by virtue of the *Mosaic* Covenant; and the presumption is, that where there is no such Contract, God will not exercise such a power; especially considering that tho' the *Jews* rejected God himself from reigning over them, & were for choosing a new King, yet he bids *Samuel* * thrice in the same Chapter to *hearken to the voice of the People*. But of this, and all other arguments of this nature, more fully hereafter.

B. THE Reasons you have given do not fully satisfy me; but that some things may be requir'd by God as Governor of the Universe, which are meerly positive; nay, that *Rites*, & *Ceremonies*, *Signs*, or *Symbols* might be arbitrarily enjoin'd, and so intermix'd with matters of Morality, as to bind the Consciences of all Men at all times; and therefore, if you please, we will review this point.

A. WITH all my heart, for this alone is the point that must decide this Question, *Whether Natural and Reveal'd Religion do really differ?* As for *Natural Religion*, that, as you well know, takes in all those duties which flow from the Reason and Nature of things, and the Relations we stand in to God & our Fellow-Creatures; and consequently was there an instituted

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* 1 Sam. 8. 4. &c.

Religion which differs from that of Nature, its Precepts must be arbitrary, as not founded on the Nature and Reason of things, but depending on meer will and pleasure; otherwise it wou'd be the same with Natural Religion. And tho' 'tis difficult to prove a negative, yet, I think, I can fully shew you, by adding other reasons to those already mention'd, that God, the great Governor of the Universe, can't give Mankind any such Precepts; and consequently, that *Natural & Revel'd Religion* only differ in the manner of their being deliver'd.

CHAP. X.

God does not act arbitrarily, or interpose unnecessarily; but leaves these things, that can only be consider'd as Means (as such are in their own nature mutable) to human Discretion, to determine as it thinks most conducing to these things, which are in their own nature obligatory.

IN order to settle this point, 'tis necessary to see how far this Natural Law extends. It not only commands that *Evil-doers should be punish'd*, but that Men, according to the different circumstances they are under, shou'd take the most proper methods for doing it, & vary as exigences require; so it not only requires that Justice shou'd be done Men as to their several claims, but that the readiest, & most effectual way of doing it shou'd be taken; and the same may be said of an other instances of this nature. If God interposes further, and prescribes a particular way of doing these things, from which Men at no time, or upon no account ought to vary, he not only interposes unnecessarily, but to the prejudice of the end

for which he thus interposes. And as to matters relating to the Worship of God, it is the voice of Nature that God shou'd be publickly worshipp'd; & that Men shou'd do this in the most convenient way, by appointing amongst themselves time, place, persons, and all other things which require special determination. And, certainly, there's as much reason that things of this nature shou'd be left to human Discretion, as any other whatever; considering the different conditions & circumstances which Christians may be under, and the handle designing Men might otherwise take, to impose upon weak persons what they please, on pretence of divine right.

THIS being premis'd, the sole question is, Whether God, who, for many Ages, did not command, or forbid any thing, but what was moral or immoral; nor yet does so to the greatest part of Mankind, has, in some places & in some cases, broke into the rule of his own conduct, & issu'd out certain Commands which have no foundation in reason, by obliging Men to observe such things as wou'd not oblige were they not impos'd; or if the imposition was taken off, wou'd immediately return to their primitive indifference?

To suppose then such Commands, is it not to suppose God acts arbitrarily, and commands for commanding-sake; & that too under the severest penalties? Can such Commands be the effects of infinite Wisdom & Goodness? Or, if there be no reason why a thing shou'd be done at all, or if to be done, why it shou'd be done rather this way than that way; or why Men shou'd not vary means, as they judge most conducive to the end, for whose sake alone they were design'd; can there be any cause, why a Being, which never acts unnecessarily, and whose Commands are all the effects of infinite Wisdom, shou'd interpose? 'Tis so far from being necessary for God to interpose in such cases as these, that it only serves for a handle to human

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imposition: for there's nothing so indifferent, but may, if believ'd to have Divinity stamp'd upon it, be perverted by designing Men to the vilest purposes; and in truth, there's nothing of this nature introduc'd into Religion; but what, I am afraid, has been some time or other so perverted.

ONE wou'd think it a thing wholly indifferent, who sprinkl'd an Infant, or from whose hands we receiv'd the Sacramental Bread & Wine, as long as the rules of decency & order were observ'd; yet has there not been a Set of Men, who, on pretence of a divine right to do those things, have made the Christian World believe, they have a discretionary power to bestow, or withhold the means of Salvation; and, by virtue of this claim, have over-aw'd them into a slavish obedience, & a blind Submission?

THERE's no good or hurt in drawing two lines across one another, & yet what have not Priests made the poor people believe they cou'd do by virtue of it, as curing diseases, driving away Devils, and doing an infinity of other miracles? And in short, they have made it one of the chief engines of their craft, for the better carrying on of which, they persuaded the People to adore the Cross, miraculously found after it had been bury'd about three hundred years; & the wood of it has since so wonderfully encreas'd, as to be able to make innumerable Crosses, whereof each bit contain'd the virtue of the whole.

CONFESSION of sins to honest & judicious persons, might be of service, by the prudent advice they gave how to avoid the like sins for the future; but the *Pseudo Priests* claiming a power by divine right to *absolve people upon Confession*, have been let into the secrets of all persons, & by virtue of it have govern'd all things, and have made the *sins of the people*, not to be pardon'd but on their terms, the *harvest* of the *Priests*.

AMONG the *Jews*, the *Anointing with oil* was look'd on as very medicinal, and generally us'd in sickness; they pray'd & anointed the sick in hopes of a recovery: But tho' the Anointing in these colder climates is thought of no use in sickness, yet the *Papists* have built a most superstitious practice on it, which, for the greater reverence, they call the Sacrament of *Extreme Unction*; and which their Priests are not to administer as long as there's hopes of recovery.

WHAT can be more indifferent, or harmless, consider'd in themselves, than the Ceremonies of *oiling the heads of Kings*, & *laying hands on the heads of Elders* or *Presbyters*? & yet what absurd pretences have not Priests, who have the art of turning the most indifferent things to a superstitious use, drawn from thence to the prejudice of both Church and State?

IT was an ancient custom among the *Hebrews*, when they pray'd for a blessing on any person, to lay hands on him: Thus *Jacob* laid his hands on the Sons of *Joseph*, & *Moses* on *Joshua*. And among the primitive Christians, when any Congregation chose their Minister, they pray'd that he might duly execute that office, to which they had ordain'd him, & in praying, he that was the Mouth of the Congregation (the whole Assembly not being able conveniently to do it) laid his hands on him.

THIS gave a rise to the Clergy to pretend, that their *Laying on of hands upon a Man*, was necessary to qualify him for the Ministry; they by that act having given him the Holy Ghost, & an indelible character with certain spiritual powers; so that the People must either be without Ministers, or take one they had thus ordain'd, however unqualify'd they might think him.

IT's a thing indifferent in itself, whether *Men meet to pray in this, or that place*; but the Christians out of a superstitious reverence to the Reliques of the Martyrs, usually praying at their Tombs, came by degrees, as their reverence for them increas'd, to offer
their

their prayers to them; which was a great change from their praying for them among the other dead, as was in the first Ages a general practice; & which, some of our High-church Priests are zealous for restoring, & pretend we have better proof for its being a Catholick doctrine, than for the authority of several Books of Scripture.

THE primitive Christians frequently consulting their Clergy in relation to Marriages, gave them a handle to set up for Judges by divine right in all matrimonial causes; and many prohibited Degrees as well as spiritual Relations, such as *God-fathers* & *God-mothers*, &c. were introduc'd, to give the Clergy frequent opportunities to grant, at their own price, dispensations; by which means the succession & inheritance not only of private estates, but of Principalities & Kingdoms, in a great measure depended on them. And as an appendix to this spiritual usurpation, they hook'd in the cognizance of all carnal causes, incontinence in single as well as married persons. Thus you see, how easily Mankind may be abus'd, where 'tis believ'd, that Religion can require any thing inconsistent with the rights and liberties God has allow'd them by the Law of Nature; and how dangerous 'tis to trust any thing with Men, who pretend a divine right to whatever they can lay hands on. To give an instance how severely this divine right was exerted by the Pope, as Head of the Church: * „ *Robert*, King of *France*, „ having marry'd a Lady of the House of *Burgundy*, „ a match very advantageous to the State, & tho' he „ had the consent of his Bishops, yet he, & the whole „ Kingdom were excommunicated by the Pope, because this Lady was in the fourth degree of consanguinity, and the King had been God-father to her Child by a former Husband; which so distress'd „ the poor King, that all his Servants, except three „ or four, deserted him, and no one would touch

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the

„ the victuals which came from his table, which were, „ therefore, thrown to the dogs.

I shall give one instance more. Men are oblig'd to avoid as much as conveniently they can the infectious conversation of immoral persons; & it was, no doubt, at first a duty in a special manner, for Christians, compass'd round with *Pagans*, to observe this rule in relation to their own body, & agree to shun any such person as one who had his *Father's Wife*: & tho' this is no more than what is daily done in private societies, & was easily practis'd amongst Christians when they were but few, yet because the Minister might collect the votes, and declare the opinion of the Assembly, the Clergy by degrees not only excluded the Congregation from this their natural right, but claim'd, as giv'n them by Heaven, a power to excommunicate whom they pleased, even their own Sovereign, and that too for things relating to their own interest: And they order'd not only their own Congregations, but all Christians, on peril of their Salvation, to *avoid all commerce with the Excommunicated*, and ordain'd, that if he did not in forty days give the Church satisfaction, the Magistrate was bound to imprison him, and confiscate his Estate. And the Princes, instead of resenting these incroachments on their power, had so little sense as to pass this into a Law; not imagining this treatment wou'd reach them: but they soon felt, that the Church claim'd the same power over them as over other Christians, looking on all to be alike subject to their spiritual power. And accordingly Kings were often excommunicated, their Subjects absolv'd of their oaths of allegiance, & their dominions given to more orthodox Princes to be held of the Church, which, no doubt, was in a flourishing Condition, when she, as often as her interest requir'd it, absolv'd Princes of their oaths to their Subjects, & Subjects of theirs to their Sovereigns, and by Virtue of her spiritual power, dispos'd, as she thought fit, of Mens Estates, Honours,

Honours, and even Lives. *What has been may be?* And in all probability would be, were the Clergy as united among themselves as formerly.

In a word, there's nothing in itself so indifferent, either as to matter or manner, but if it be engrafted into Religion, and monopoliz'd by the Priests, may endanger the substance of it. This has been plainly shewn by those Divines, who, at the *Reformation*, & since, have argu'd against all impositions: they have prov'd that most of the corruptions of *Papery* began at some rites, which seem'd at first very innocent, but were afterwards abus'd to Superstition and Idolatry, and swell'd up to that bulk, as to oppress, & siffle true Religion with their number & weight. And, indeed, there's no Sect, but complains how superstitiously Rites and Ceremonies are us'd by all, except themselves. And since I am defending the Liberties given by God to Mankind, & which, without ingratitude to the donor, as well as injury to ourselves, we can't give up, I do not doubt you will hear me with patience, because if I prove my point, I shall, it may be hoped, in some measure put an end to those otherwise endless disputes, which divide, & distract the Christian World.

WHATSOEVER is in itself indifferent, whether as to matter or manner, must be so to an All-wise Being, who judges of things as they are; & for the same reason that he commands things which are good, and forbids those which are evil, he leaves Men at liberty in all things indiffereant; & 'tis in these only, that our liberty of acting as we please consists.

THINGS, which are of no value in themselves, can be no motives to an All-wise Being to punish us, or to clog our happiness with any such needless observances: And consequently, Men, as far as they assert our future happiness, or any part of it, to depend on such things, do so far derogate from the Wisdom & Goodness of God, and from those motives we have to love, & honour him. The arbitrary Commands

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of a Tyrant may be obey'd out of fear, but just and rational Laws alone can move the affection of rational creatures.

Is it reasonable to believe, an All-wise & Gracious Being is so fond of indifferent things, that he subjects his Children to suffer even in this life on their account? And yet you must own, if he has made these the subject of his Commands, they ought to suffer every thing rather than not observe them: but if God will not have Men punish'd in this world, and much less in the next, upon the account of things indifferent, they can never be the subject of his Commands.

Tho' a judicious Author supposes a Form of divine Worship in itself indifferent, may be requir'd by God for the sake of peace & unity, yet at the same time he contends, that * „ God does not expect we „ shou'd comply with that Form, if it brings misery „ on ourselves, or confusion to the publick; because „ that wou'd be preferring a thing in itself indifferent „ to the happiness of our lives, and the peace of the „ Publick; and that to suppose the contrary, wou'd „ be breaking in upon the spotless character of our „ heavenly Father, by representing him not as a wise „ and good, but a peevish and ill-natur'd Being; „ who takes an unreasonable resentment at the pudent „ conduct of his Children. „ But will not this „ as strongly infer, that God cou'd not command the „ observing such things, which, if observ'd; wou'd destroy his moral Character; and which, instead of preserving peace & unity, wou'd bring misery on private persons, and confusion the Publick? whereas these blessings of peace and unity can never be obtain'd by a forc'd conformity, nor by any other method than allowing People their natural liberty in all such matters. And,

If Religion consists in imitating the Perfections of God, what Perfection of God do the superstitious imitate?

* Chubb's Suppl. to his Prev. Quest. 27, 28.

tate, when they contend, as *pro Aris & Focis*, for Forms, Rites, and Ceremonies?

IF in Heaven there's no room for arbitrary Precepts, to incumber that moral goodness which is the sole business of the bless'd above, what cou'd hinder us, did we but make that too our only concern here, from enjoying a sort of Heaven on Earth, free from all tyrannical impositions, and endless quarrels about indifferent things?

IN a word, If there's nothing in a Religion which comes from God, but what is most excellent, what room can there be for indifferent things? Can such things as have no worth or excellency, contribute to the worth, or excellency of Religion? If they cou'd, the more they abounded, the more excellent wou'd Religion be; which yet is so far from being true, even in the opinion of those who contend for such things, that even they, when they are to shew the excellency of the Christian Religion, recommend it for having but few of those things; which is supposing it loses of its excellency in proportion to what it has of this nature; and that they have a higher & more honourable conception of it, who believe it has no such mixture to spoil its beauty, and destroy its simplicity; but that, like its Author, 'tis wholly spiritual, & as such, worthy its divine original.

ONE wou'd think these men must appear ridiculous to themselves, who, tho' they recommend the Christian Religion, as purely spiritual, in opposition to the carnal Religion of the *Jews*, yet at the same time contend, it has some ordinances as little spiritual as any the *Jews* had; and put a greater stress upon 'em, than ever the *Jews* did on any of theirs.

IF God's works shew infinite Wisdom; there's no reason to imagine but his Laws do the same; but then they must be moral Laws, for these alone can speak his Wisdom as plainly to all Mankind as his works do: They both alike have the character of infinite

finite Wisdom impress'd on them, & both alike discover their divine original.

If all God's Laws are of a piece, must they not all be built on the eternal Reason of things? Nay, if that be sufficient to determine him in one case, it must be so in all. But on the contrary, if God acts arbitrarily in any one instance, he must, or at least may, do so in all; since no foreign cause, nothing but his nature, could make him act so. But God forbid we shou'd imagine, that any of his Laws have not impress'd on them the same character of the highest Wisdom and Goodness, that is impress'd on the whole frame of Nature, and on every part of it.

'Tis impossible Men shou'd have any just idea of the Perfections of God, who think that the dictates of infinite Wisdom do not carry their own evidence with them; or are not by their own innate worth discoverable to all Mankind. Were it not so, how could they be distinguish'd from the uncertain opinions of weak and fallible Men; not to say the whimsies & reveries of crack-brain'd Enthusiasms? How shocking is it to hear Divines cry, that * „ Certain things, „ were they not to be ador'd as Mysteries, ought to „ be exploded as Absurdities.

If we suppose any arbitrary Commands in the Gospel, we place Christians in a worse condition than those under no Law but that of Nature, which requires nothing but what is moral; and consequently the greatest part of Mankind, who are to be judg'd by the Law they know, & not by the Law they do not know, are, on this supposition, in a better condition as to the next world than Christians; because they do not hazard the favour of God by any mistakes, or omissions in such matters.

To suppose some Men, who, tho' they exactly obey the Law of Nature, may yet be punish'd, even eternally, for not obeying another Law besides, would be

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to make God deal infinitely less mercifully with them, than with those that have no other Law: And yet in this miserable case are all Christians involv'd, if the Gospel requires such things as the Law of Nature does not; and that too under the severest penalties. And I may add, that even as to temporal happiness, they who think original and traditional Revelation don't differ, are in the better state; since they must delight in their duty, as having nothing requir'd of them, but what they most evidently see tends to their good, & consequently are free (no small happiness) from all panick fears; while they, who believe there are things merely positive in Religion, of which Reason affords no light how they are to be perform'd, or even what they are, must lye under endless doubts & fears, and according to the measure of their superstition, be wrought upon by designing Men to hate, damn, and persecute one another about such observances; as we see is actually done every where by the different Sects, who are so absurd as to believe a God of infinite Wisdom & Goodness can give his Creatures arbitrary Commands.

WHEN Men are at a loss to know from the nature and reason of things, what to believe, and what to practice, and see every where endless divisions, they must be in continual dread of such an arbitrary Being, as their unmanly & irrational fears represent God to be. *Plutarch* makes this difference between the Atheist & Superstitious; * „ One believes no Deity, the other „ wishes there was none; if he believes, 'tis against his „ will; mistrust he dares not, or call his thoughts in „ question, but could he, with security, at once throw „ off that oppressive fear, which, like the rock of „ *Tantalus*, impends, & presses over him, he would „ with equal joy spurn his enslaving thoughts, and „ embrace the Atheist's state & opinion, as the happiest deliverance. Atheists are free of superstition, „ but

* *Treatise of Superstition. To. 2. pag. 170. E, F.*

„ but the Superstitious are in will and inclination „ Atheists, tho' impotent in thought, and unable to „ believe of the divine Being as they willingly would. And I am afraid, this now is the case with most of these superstitious persons, who represent God as a most cruel Being, damning Men to eternity, even for mistaken opinions, or about such things too as have no foundation in Reason. And perhaps, the endeavouring to drown all thoughts of such a tyrannical Deity, is no small occasion of that gross immorality, which does every where prevail, & must ever do so where superstition abounds.

'Tis Mens not being govern'd by the reason of things, which makes them divided about trides, and lay the utmost stress on such things as wise Men would be asham'd of. 'Tis on the account of these, that the different Sects set the highest value on themselves, & think they are the peculiar favourites of Heaven, while they condemn all others for opinions & practices not more senseless, than those themselves look on as essentials. And were it not in so serious a matter; it would be diverting to see how they damn one another, for placing Religion in whimsical notions, and fantastical Rites & Ceremonies, without making the least reflection on what they themselves are doing.

WHAT reason has a *Papist*, for instance, to laugh at an *Indian*, who thinks it contributes to his future happiness to dye with a Cow's tail in his hands, while he lays as great a stress on rubbing a dying Man with oil? Has not the *Indian* as much right to moralize this action of his, and shew its significancy, as the *Papist* any of his mystick rites, or *Horns Poens* tricks? which have as little foundation in the nature or reason of things.

SUPPOSE one came from the furthestmost parts of the Earth, vouching it as a divine Revelation, that the nails of our Children are, at a certain time, to be paid by certain Persons with certain ceremonies, in order

order to make them capable of Salvation; and that such as dy'd before their nails were thus par'd, remain'd for ever in a very wretched state; wou'd not every one here, without examining into this Man's mission, or without regard to those spiritual things signify'd under paring of nails, reject this belief as unworthy of having God for its Author? And yet as absurd as this may appear to us, the superstitious *Mahometans* * think they are oblig'd to have their nails par'd during their sickness, if they apprehend it to be mortal.

THEY must be very little acquainted with the nature of a spiritual Religion, who think it can any ways consist in not going to rest when Men are sleepy; not eating, when they are hungry; or abstaining from, or using certain meats & drinks at stated times; and in washings, sprinklings, and lustrations by blood or water; and yet these things were in so high a repute with most of the *Pagans*, that they thought they wou'd atone for the greatest immoralities.

*Le nimis faciles, qui tristia crimina cordis
Flammis totis seque putatis aqua.* Ovid. Fast. l. 2. 45.

THE *Taurololia*, or the bedawbing a Man in a pit, all over with the blood of a Bull, which fell on him through holes made in the plank on which the beast was slain, was believ'd to wash away all his sins, & he, happy Man, regenerated to eternity, provided that once in twenty years he renewed this mystical regeneration: & not only great Persons, but whole Cities might perform this religious Ceremony by deputation, and receive the benefit. A short account of this you meet with in *Fonzenelle's History of Oracles*, taken from *Prudentius*. †

THO' the Heathen Priests made the People believe they cou'd be clean from their sins by sacrifices, and other

* *Hid's Pref. to Ebovius of the Turkish Liturgy, &c.*
† *Peri Stephanor, de Romano*, p. 135, 136. See *Salutat. ad Hiljogab*, cap. 7.

other external things, yet it was as themselves had the application of them, they were the Persons to whom the Gods had committed the *religious rubbing bristles*; tho' the Men of sense among the *Pagans* were not thus to be impos'd on, which made *Tully* say,

*Animi labes nec diuturnitate evanescere, nec amnibus
nullis elui potest.* De Leg. l. 2. c. 10.

Lactantius seems to be of another opinion, in saying,
„ * Give us one that is unjust, foolish, & a sinner,
„ and in one instant he shall be just, prudent, & in-
„ nocent; with one laver all his wickedness shall be
„ wash'd away.

In a word, while Priests of what denomination soever pretend authority to absolve sinners, and the people are so void of sense as to rely on their absolution, Natural Religion, which puts the whole stress on internal penitence & true virtue in the soul, will be despis'd, allowing no *succedaneum*, no commuting, or compounding with Heaven. And, indeed, all such commuting, or compounding powers, wherever they are suppos'd to be lodg'd, serve as a Bank of credit for the transgressors, and are a mighty incitement to all manner of villainy. And in former days, the great Men, after having oppress'd and plunder'd people, thought to compound with Heaven, by letting the Clergy share in the spoil; and 'tis on this notion so many Abbies & Monasteries have been founded; & the superstitious, as long as they are persuaded there is any virtue in externals, will, as we see by constant experience, chiefly depend on such things. And I may add,

THIS Doctrine, that one Man may not only merit for himself by doing more than God requires of him, but that the merit of such actions may be transfer'd to another, who has done less than God requires of him, has been a great incitement to wickedness; and those who have acted a most immoral part during their

* *Institut. l. 3. c. 26. n. 9.*

their whole lives, have believ'd they might comfortably rely on it; nothing being thought too hard for merit & mediation.

THERE are none, I think, now so absurd, as in words to maintain, that there's the least variableness in God, much less that he is an arbitrary Being, commanding things for commanding-sake; yet are not they, who assert there are merely positive things in the Christian Religion, guilty of this absurdity; in supposing that God, who had the goodness for a long time, not to confine Mankind to any indifferent things, yet at length chang'd his mind, & repented of this great goodness; & arbitrarily depriv'd, they will not say, all Mankind, but no small number of this liberty; and requir'd of them the belief of certain useless speculations, & the practice of certain indifferent things on the severest penalties? And when they lament that the Christian World, even from the earliest days, has been in perpetual broils about such things, do they not suppose that God can give arbitrary Commands, & that those Commands are involv'd in great obscurity? Whereas, if merely positive things were requir'd, those, not being like matters of morality, discoverable by their own light, wou'd be made as plain as infinite Wisdom could render them; & to prevent their being perverted to serve ill purposes, we shou'd have been punctually told when, how, and by whom, those arbitrary things shou'd be apply'd, as well as that they were to be obligatory for ever.

B. IF God has reveal'd any thing in a way liable to be mistaken, he can't be displeas'd with sincere people for mistaking it.

A. THAT's very true, but certainly the end of God's giving any Precepts, was not to deliver them so obscurely that people might be faultless if they mistook, but to make 'em so plain that they could not well mistake: And this is agreeable to Infinite Wisdom directed by infinite Goodness, which, certainly, will

give us equal degrees of evidence for religious truths, which so much concern us, as it has done for truths of less importance.

For my part, I can't help being of the sentiments of a learned Divine, who, after having prov'd at large, that Morality is capable of Demonstration, concludes with saying, * „ I shall only here repeat, that Man „ being a reasonable agent, Reason is the Law & Rule „ of his actions; there's no truth in *Mathematicks* „ more clear, & incontestable than this. Now 'tis as „ easy for him, when he examines his actions by this „ Rule, to see whether they agree together, as to „ know when two lines are compar'd, whether they „ are of the same, or a different length. -- Why „ should demonstration then be confin'd only to „ numbers & figures? -- Nay, if we argue from the „ importance of Morality, it will be found much more „ agreeable to the goodness of God, who gave us „ our intellectual faculties, that the truths which are „ of the greatest concern to us, should, if we make „ a due use of those faculties, admit of the greatest „ evidence. „ I think, I need only add, that was there any thing but Morality necessary to constitute true Religion, we might be certain that the Goodness of God wou'd give us a demonstration for it, equal to that he has given us for Morality. But,

If there are now things which are not moral in Religion, does not that suppose a change of mind in God, and then where will you stop? For if changeableness was not a perfection, it wou'd not be in him; and if all his Perfections are infinite, must not this be so too? And is it not as reasonable to suppose, he may command some indifferent things to-day, and others to-morrow; or some in this part of the world; and some in another; as at first to command moral, and then super-add indifferent things? If indifferent things can contribute to the perfection of Revelation, there may

* Fiddes's Body of Divinity. Par. 2. B. I. c. 11.

may be endless Revelations; & the last always more perfect, as having new indifferent things. It was not about mings of a moral nature, that there were such divisions in the primitive times, and that *Montanism* spread itself over a great part of the Christian world; the followers of *Montanus*, as *Eusebius* writes, * boasting that he was the Paraclet, & that *Priscilla* & *Maximilla* his companions were his Prophetesses. And *Tertullian*, as is own'd by the Translator of his Apology, says, †
 „ That the Law, & the Prophets were to be look'd
 „ on as the infancy, and the Gospel, as it were, the
 „ youth; but that there was no compleat perfection
 „ to be found, but in the instruction of the Holy Ghost,
 „ who spake by *Montanus* : „ But to make some apo-
 „ logy for his laps'd Father, he says, „ The Arch-
 „ Heretick *Montanus* supported the character of a
 „ most holy, mortify'd, & extraordinary person for a
 „ considerable time; the world rung with the visions
 „ and prophecies of him, & his two damsels; & the
 „ face of severity and saintship consecrated their re-
 „ veries, & made real possession pass for inspiration. --
 „ The Churches of *Phrygia*, and afterwards other
 „ Churches, divided upon the account of these new
 „ Revelations; & even the very Bishop of *Rome* him-
 „ self for some time espous'd the vanity, and made
 „ much of the Impostor. „ And had he continu'd to
 „ do so, it might, perhaps, have obtain'd; since we find
 „ the Christians in the primitive times came intirely into
 „ a more gross imposture, and had faith for the most
 „ palpable forgery of the *Sybilline* Oracles being writ by
 „ real Prophetesses under divine inspirations. And the
 „ whole Christian world for more than the two first
 „ centuries believ'd the *Millenarian* Heresy, as it is now
 „ call'd; for which, indeed, they pretended other proofs
 „ than the divine authority of the *Sybils*. And there has
 „ scarce been an age since, but where some such attempt

H. 3 has

* *Ecc. Hist.* l. 5. c. 14.

† *Ker's Prelim. Disc. to Tertul. Apol.* p. 149.

has been made; & that of *Papery*, which is the grossest attempt on the credulity of Mankind succeeded; tho' the *Mons* in the twelfth Century were not satisfy'd even with that, & therefore, endeavour'd to introduce a new Gospel, call'd *Evangelium novum*, or the *Gospel of the Holy Ghost*; * and affirm'd that this Gospel of the Spirit excell'd that of Christ as much as the light of the Sun does that of the Moon.

IN short, to this belief, that there may be things in Religion not founded on Nature & Reason, & that these may be reserv'd for this, or that period of time, are owing all the visions & reveries among the *Papists*, & other Enthusiastick Christians; & upon this absurd notion is founded the most spreading Religion of *Mahomet*, who pretended to be the Paraclete promis'd by Jesus to compleat, & perfect all things: And,

IN a word, to this belief are owing all the false Revelations that ever were in the world; and except we allow there are certain tests flowing from the nature of things, whereby the meanest capacities may distinguish truth from falsehood, we shall be ever liable to be impos'd on by Mad-men as well as Impostors.

IF God can command some things arbitrarily, we can't be certain, but that he may command all things so; for tho' some Commands should relate to things in their own nature good, yet how can we know that an arbitrary Being commands them for our reason; & consequently, since an arbitrary will may change each moment, we can never be certain of the will of such a Being. And,

TO suppose that God by the Law of Nature leaves Men at liberty in all indifferent things, and yet by a positive Law restrains this liberty in certain parts and ages of the world, is to suppose God determines one way by immediate, & another way by mediated Revelation; both Laws too subsisting at the same time.

E.
* *Usser. de Chris. Eccles. successionē & statu. lib. 2. sect. 2.*

E. We say that the Law of Nature, however immutable as to Good & Evil, has enjoin'd nothing in relation to indifferent things; so that there's a large field, in which all Legislators, human as well as divine, may exert their power.

A. It's true, the Law of Nature leaves Men at liberty to act as they please in all indifferent matters; and if any traditionary Law abridges this liberty, so far 'tis contrary to that of Nature, & invades those rights which Nature & its Author has given Mankind.

HUMAN Legislators are so far from having a right to deprive their Subjects of this liberty, that their main end in submitting to government is, to be protected in acting as they think fit in all such cases where no one is injur'd; & herein the whole of human liberty consists, the contrary being a state of meer vassalage: & Men are more or less miserable, according as they are more or less depriv'd of this liberty; especially in matters of meer Religion, wherein they ought to be most free.

To suppose God has *in these last days*, as they are call'd in Scripture, depriv'd any part of Mankind of that Liberty which before was granted to all, would be to make him act unreasonably; since all those reasons which oblig'd him to command good, or forbid evil things, must wholly cease in relation to a subject, which by being indifferent partakes of neither: and was there any reason to deprive Men of their liberty in indifferent things, they would then cease to be indifferent; on the contrary the same reasons which oblige him to interpose in things, whose nature is either good or evil, forbids it in indifferent things, since Mens happiness depends on their liberty in all such things. Whatever is unreasonable for God to do, is contrary to the eternal Law of his nature; and consequently, to deprive Men in any of these cases, is to make the dictates of his Nature, & his revealed Will to clash.

115 CHRISTIANITY as old

In short, the Law of Nature either is, or is not, a perfect Law: if the first, 'tis not capable of additions; if the last, does it not argue want of wisdom in the Legislator, in first enacting such an imperfect Law, and then in letting it continue thus imperfect from age to age; and at last thinking to make it absolutely perfect, by adding some merely positive and arbitrary Precepts? To what end does God continually impress on Christians as well as others this Law of Nature? since that was needless, had they another more perfect, & more plainly reveal'd.

If Men have been at all times oblig'd to avoid Superstition, and embrace true Religion, there must have been at all times, sufficient marks of distinction; which could not arise from their having different objects, since God is the object of both, but from the having different notions of him & his conduct. Nay, allowing that the Light of Nature was sufficient to teach Men, that true Religion consists in entertaining such notions of God as are worthy of him, & Superstition in such as are unworthy of him; yet that alone would not enable Men, when they came to particulars, to distinguish one from the other: And, therefore, the same Light of Nature must teach them what notions are worthy, and what unworthy of having God for their Author. But how can there be such marks flowing from the nature of Religion & Superstition, if what is Superstition by the Light of Nature, can, notwithstanding these marks, be made a part of Religion by Revelation?

If he, who resembles God most is like to understand him best, is it not * „ because, as Bishop Tillotson observes, he finds these perfections in some „ measure in himself, which he contemplates in the „ divine Nature; and nothing gives a Man so sure „ a notion of things as practice and experience; „ every good Man is in some degree partaker of the divine

„ divine Nature, and feels that in himself, which he
 „ conceives to be in God, so that this Man does ex-
 „ perience what others do but talk of; he sees the
 „ image of God in himself, & is able to discourse of
 „ him from an inward sense & feeling of his excel-
 „ lency. „ But this would not be just arguing, if God
 „ was an arbitrary Being, & cou'd command his Crea-
 „ tures things which carried no perfection or goodness
 „ with them.

IN a word, if the essence of Religion consists in
 believing and practising such things, as have a real
 worth & excellency in them, tending to the honour
 of God, and the good of Man, the essence of Super-
 stition, which is its opposite, must consist in imagining
 to propitiate an allwise and gracious Being by such
 things as have no worth or excellency in them, such
 as may as well not be done, as done, or as well done
 this as that way. Superstition is defin'd by Dr. H. More
 (& all our Divines speak to the same purpose) * to be
 that impiety, by which a Man considers God to be so light
 or passionate, as with trivial things, either to be appeas'd,
 or else mov'd to wrath. Can any thing be more tri-
 vial, than useless speculations, & unnecessary obser-
 vations?

How numerous soever Christians may be, tho' they
 are but few in comparison of the rest of Mankind,
 yet the Church of Christ, by the confession of all par-
 ties, is a very small body of Men; each Sect, tho'
 they complain of one another's uncharitableness, yet
 they, excluding all other Sects, either as *Schismatics*
 or *Heretics*, confine Salvation to their own Church.
 Dr. Storr says, †, „ While Men behold the state of Re-
 „ ligion thus miserably broken and divided, and the
 „ professors of it crumb'd into so many Sects & par-
 „ ties, and each party spitting fire and damnation at

H 5

„ its

* *The Abridgm. of his Morals or Account of Virtue* l. 2.
 p. 122. † *Christ. Life*, P. 11. Vol. 1. c. 3. p. 112.

„ its adversary, so that, if all say true, or, indeed,
 „ any two of them in five hundred Sects, which there
 „ are in the world, (& for ought, I know, there may
 „ be five thousand) it is five hundred to one, but that
 „ every one is damn'd, because every one damns all
 „ but itself, and itself is damn'd by four hundred &
 „ ninety nine. „ How, I say, can these differences
 be avoided, as long as Men take into their notion of
 Religion, nay, make unnecessary things necessary parts
 of it; and if many of our Divines have got rid of
 these absurd notions, is it not because they are, what
 in contempt they are call'd, *Rationalists*?

THE pious Bishop Taylor says, * „ He could not
 „ expect, but that God wou'd some way or other
 „ punish Christians, by reason of their pertinacious
 „ disputing of things unnecessary; undeterminable &
 „ unprofitable; and for their hating and persecuting
 „ their brethren (which shou'd be as dear to them as
 „ their own lives) for not consenting to one anothers
 „ follies & senseless vanities.

BUT, is there any certain way of judging what are
 unnecessary or unprofitable things, but by the rules
 here laid down, of judging of things from their na-
 ture & tendency? Without observing this rule, there's
 nothing so trifling, or senseless, but People may be
 persuaded to place Religion in, and be in continual
 broils about it. If a dispute between two Preachers,
 whether the first words in the Lord's Prayer shou'd
 be translated *Father our*, or *Our Father*, cou'd cause
 such disturbances. as it lately did at *Hamburg*, what
 is there so indifferent, if once believ'd to belong to
 Religion, but may have pernicious effects? And there
 are a number of instances in all ages, where things
 as trifling have occasion'd strange disorders.

And the primitive times were not free from them:
 the memorable Mr. Hales gives this account of the
 then quarrel about the time of keeping *Easter*;

„ It
 * *Epistle Dedic. to Liberty of Prophesying.*

It being, *says he*, * upon error taken for necessary, that an *Easter* must be kept, and upon worse than error, if I may so speak, (for it was no less than a point of *Judaism* forc'd upon the Church) thought further necessary, that the ground for the time of our keeping that Feast, must be the rule left by *Moses* to the *Jews*; there arose a stout question, Whether we were to celebrate it with the *Jews* on the fourteenth Moon, or the Sunday following. This matter, tho' most unnecessary, most vain, yet caus'd as great a combustion as ever was in the Church; the *West* separating from the *East* for many years together. In this fantastical hurry, I can't see but all the world were *Schismatics*; neither can any thing excuse them from that imputation, excepting only this, that we charitably suppose that all parties, out of conscience did what they did. A thing which befel them, thro' the ignorance of their Guides; and because thro' sloth and blind obedience Men examin'd not the things they were taught, but like beasts of burden patiently couch'd down, & indifferently underwent whatever their superiors laid upon them.

And can we, *says Dr. Burnet*, † think without astonishment, that such matters, as giving the Sacrament in leavened or unleavened bread; or an explication of the Procession of the Holy Ghost, whether it was from the Father and the Son, or from the Father by the Son, cou'd have rent the *Greek* and *Latin* Churches so violently one from another, that the *Latines*, rather than assist the other, look'd on till they were destroy'd by the *Ottoman* Family?

AND other instances he gives of fatal disturbances from disputes about trifles: as the removing the pictures of certain Bishops out of a Church occasion'd Image-worship; for those who oppos'd their removal,

went

* *Traff of Schism.* † *Burnet's Serm. Ann. 1681.*

went so far as to maintain, that Pictures ought not only to be set up, but worshipp'd; which caus'd not only great disorders in the *East*, but made *Italy* to revolt at the Pope's instigation. This contest too begat another, Whether the Sacrament was only the image, or the very substance of Christ?

I might add, that the dispute between the *Lutherans* & *Calvinists* about the Sacrament, tho' it has created such fierce animosities, is merely verbal, since both sides are against any change in the elements, & both sides maintain a real presence of the body of Christ.

I need not have gone to distant times and places for instances, our own late divisions and persecutions about such trifling things, as Rites and Ceremonies, nay, habits & postures, wou'd in all likelihood have ended in the utter ruin both of Church and State, had not the blessed Revolution interpos'd.

B. I wou'd not have you treat what you call postures so irreverently: ought not People to kneel at their devotions?

A. THE whole Christian World for many ages thought not; & the *Anti-Nicene* Fathers, * as well as the Council of *Nice*, forbid kneeling, on all Sundays, & all other days between *Easter* & *Whit-sunday*.

In a word, if those sentiments must be true, which tend most to make Men love & honour God, by giving the brightest and noblest ideas of his Wisdom and Goodness, and which free him from the imputation of change and inconstancy, and from imposing from time to time arbitrary Commands, & from partiality and respect of persons, what I have laid down must be true, & the contrary, not only false, but impious: But however, since this is a point of the utmost consequence, I shall proceed to other arguments, & shew how inconsistent it is with the good of Mankind, to suppose any merely positive things to be part of the ingredients which constitute true Religion.

* *Daillet* of the Fathers, l. 2. c. 6. p. 336, 337.

CHAP. XI.

The supposing Things meerly positive to be made the Ingredients of Religion, is inconsistent with the Good of Mankind as well as the Honour of God.

THE Happiness of human society, and of every particular member consisting in the due observation & practice of Morality, whatever diverts, or discourages that, must be highly injurious. Now 'tis certain, that the mind may be over-loaded as well as the body, & the more it is taken up with the observation of things, which are not of a moral nature, the less it will be able to attend to those that are; which requiring the application of the whole Man, can never be rightly perform'd, while the mind, by laying stress on other things, is diverted from attending on them; especially, if it be consider'd, that Superstition, if once suffer'd to mix with Religion, will always be gaining ground. If Reason is to be heard, no unnecessary things will be admitted; but if it be not, where shall we stop? If people are once brought to believe such things are good for any thing, they will be apt to believe they are good for all things; at least, pretences will never be wanting for a thousand things of this nature; and there's nothing of this kind that men will not come into, if they are made to believe they carry any merit with them. These they will be punctual in observing, in hopes to atone for indulging themselves in their darling vices; which they, not knowing how to leave, and yet willing to secure their future happiness, hope by the help of such expedients, to compound with Heaven; & then vainly imagine, they cannot have too many things of this nature, or shew too great a zeal for the practice of

of them, when assur'd by their Priests, (who, as they fondly imagine, know the whole counsel of God) that they are acceptable to the Deity, & tend to make him propitious to religious observers of them.

THE *Banditti*, & Bravoes most religiously observe the orders of their Church, about *not eating flesh*, &c. and instances of this nature might be produc'd from the most immoral in all Churches, who, not satisfy'd with practising such things themselves, think it highly meritorious to compel others to do the same. And, indeed, the substance of Religion has been destroy'd in most places, to make room for Superstition, immorality, & persecution; which last, when Men want reason to support their opinions, always supplies its place. And are there not even now, numbers in the best reform'd Churches, of the same sentiments with those Dr *Scot* complains of? „Who, *he says*, * per-
„suade themselves, that God is wonderfully concern'd
„about small things, about trifling opinions and in-
„different actions, and the rites and modes, and ap-
„pendages of Religion; & under this persuasion they
„hope to atone for all the immoralities of their lives,
„by the forms & outides of Religion; by uncom-
„manded severities, & affected singularities; by con-
„tending for opinions, and sticking for parties; and
„being *pragmatically* zealous about the borders and
„fringes of Religion. And,

I'm afraid 'tis but too true, as is observ'd in the *Letters concerning Inspiration*; that †, Men have thought
„it an honour to be til'd that which they call zealous
„orthodox, to be firmly link'd to a certain party,
„to load others with calumnies, and to damn by an
„absolute authority the rest of Mankind; but have
„taken no care to demonstrate the sincerity & fer-
„vour of their piety, by an exact observation of the
„Gospel Morals; which has come to pass by reason
„that

* *Christ. Life* Vol. 1. P. 2. c. 6. p. 376.

† *Eng. Transl.* pag. 108.

that orthodoxy agrees very well with our passions; whereas the severe Morals of the Gospel are incompatible with our way of living. And one would be apt to think, that zeal for speculative opinions, and zeal for morality were scarce consistent, should he form his Judgment from what he sees most practis'd. Moral goodness, says Dr. Scot, * is the great stamp & impress that renders Men current in the esteem of God, whereas on the contrary, the common brand by which Hypocrites & false pretenders to Religion are stigmatiz'd, is their being zealous for the positives, and cold & indifferent as to the Morals of Religion.

And, † in general, we find mere moral principles of such weight, that in our dealings with Men, we are seldom satisfy'd by the fullest assurance giv'n us of their zeal in Religion, till we hear something further of their character. If we are told a Man is religious, we still ask *What are his Morals?* But if we hear at first that he has honest moral Principles, and is a Man of natural justice, and good temper, we seldom think of the other question, *Whether he be religious and devout?*

It is a general observation in History, that where any thing has had the appearance only of piety, and might be observ'd without any Virtue in the Soul, is easily found entertainment among superstitious Nations. Hence Tacitus says, ‡, Men extremely liable to Superstition are at the same time as violently averse to Religion. Le Clerc not only makes the same remark, but says, §, Those who had a confus'd notion of christian piety, believ'd it could not maintain itself without the help of outward objects, & I know not what heathenish pomp, which at last extinguish'd

* *Christi. Life* P. 2. Vol. 1. c. 1. p. 53.

† *Inq. concern Virtue & Merit. Treat. 4. l. 1. p. 6.*

‡ *Hist. c. 13.* — § *Life of Prudentius* pag. 317.

Eng. Transl. & Bibl. Univ. To. 12. p. 173, 174.

„guish'd the spirit of the Gospel, and substituted
„Paganism in its room.

WHATEVER appearance it might have of piety, what virtue did it require in the practice, to make war with the *Saracens* for the *Holy-Land*; (tho' considering the impieties committed there, it might be call'd *Unholy*;) yet so highly meritorious was this project for several Ages thought to be, that vast shoals of *Bigots* for its sake have frequently gone from the *West* to *Light*. Men in the *East*, who never did them any harm; and those *Bigots*, presuming on the merits of this sacred Expedition, were most enormously flagitious.

B. If this was Superstition, it was built on a notion which had long before prevail'd, of believing it a piece of piety to visit *Jerusalem*, & the holy places there. The great St. *Jerome* says, *Certe adorasse subsisterunt pedes Domini, pars Fidei est, &c.* * „That it was undoubtedly a part of faith, to go, & worship in those places, where the feet of our Saviour had once stood, & to have a sight of the tracks, which at this day continue fresh, both of his Nativity, Cross, & Passion.

A. I believe St. *Jerome*, when he says, *We ought to worship where the feet of our Lord stood*, chiefly intended his last footsteps when he mounted up to Heaven; the print of which, says *Sulpicius Severus*, † remain to this day. *Quacunque applicabamur, insolens humana suscipere terra respueret, excussis in ora apponantium sacre marmoribus. -- Et cum quotidie confluentium Fides certatim Domino calcata diripiat, claronum tamen arena non sentiat: et eadem adhuc sui speciem, velut impressis signata vestigiis, terra custodit.* And *Paulinus* says the same.

A strict observance of such things as require no virtue in the practice, and may with great ease be

* Ep. 144. ad *Desider.* To. 3. p. 198. D.

† *Sulp. Sever. Sacred Hist.* l. 2. p. 100, 101. Edit. Elzev. 1643.

punctually observ'd, makes the superstitious liable to be every where cheated by your *Tartuffs*, or *Mackworths*, while Men who put the whole stress on Morality, are represented not only as enemies to Religion, but even as encouragers of immorality, and meer Libertines, because they are for liberty in thinking; tho' this can't fail to make Men see the folly of licentiousness in acting.

AND, indeed, we shall generally find those Ecclesiasticks, who inveigh most against *Free-thinking*, are the real encouragers of immorality; by screening, not only the most immoral of their own Order on pretence of preserving the Honour of the Church, tho' to the dishonour of Religion; but also by laying the most moral, if they differ from them in speculative points, under constant sufferings; to enforce them to play the hypocrites with God and Man: and who is it that the corrupt part of the Clergy shew more inveteracy against, than the very best Men of their own Order, for not approving these methods?

It's worth while to remark, how differently Men are treated for civil & ecclesiastical offences: * „ In „ *civil cases*, as a Right Reverend & excellent Author „ observes, the Offender, if his crime be not capital, „ suffers a *temporary* punishment, proportion'd to the „ fault he has committed; and when he has undergone that, nothing further is requir'd of him, „ except in some cases to find security for his good „ behaviour for the future: But in cases of *Heresy*, „ there is no regard to the degree of the offence, „ in the punishment inflicted, nor is there any end „ of it. 'Tis not enough to have suffer'd the severest „ punishment, tho' for the smallest offence; 'tis not „ enough to give security of not offending for the „ future: The innocent offender must declare (what „ 'tis oftentimes impossible he should declare) that he

I has
* *Diffc. & Discouragements of studying the Scriptures,*
Pag. 23, 24.

„ has chang'd his sentiments, & is become *Orthodox*;
 „ and this, tho' perhaps no methods of conviction
 „ have been used, except that of punishment be one.
 „ This is the miserable condition of a Convict-Heretic:
 „ tick: The punishment which fell on him for expressing
 „ thoughts heretical, he must continue to
 „ endure for barely thinking; which is a thing not
 „ in his own power, but depends on the evidence
 „ that appears to him: He must for ever (cruel Justice!)
 „ for ever suffer for his private thoughts (tho' they
 „ go not beyond his own heart) the punishment
 „ which some overt-act has once drawn upon him.
 „ To punish *soties quoties*, as often as those overt-acts
 „ are repeated, will not satisfy the *Holy Office*. --
 „ * If an offender can't be convicted of *Heresy*, he
 „ may however be convicted of writing, or speaking
 „ against the establish'd Doctrine of the Church, and
 „ that will draw on him all the same consequences,
 „ that *Heresy* would do. -- † Well does this Author
 „ advise, whatever you do be *Orthodox*: *Orthodoxy*
 „ will cover a multitude of sins, but a cloud of virtues
 „ cannot cover the want of the minutest particle of
 „ *Orthodoxy*. -- ‡ It may, I doubt not, be demonstrated
 „ with the greatest evidence, that all Christian
 „ Churches have suffer'd more by their zeal for *Orthodoxy*,
 „ & by the violent methods taken to promote it,
 „ than from the utmost efforts of their greatest
 „ enemies. But for all that, the world will still think
 „ the same methods necessary.

A Man, who has, or pretends to have a blind zeal
 for those things which discriminate his Sect, tho' he
 be ever so immoral, too often finds countenance and
 credit from them; & tho' thought a Devil by others,
 passes for a Saint with his own party: So that the
 superstitious lye under strong temptations to be vicious,
 & the vicious to act superstitiously. Nay,

THE

* *Ibid.* pag. 26. † *Ibid.* pag. 22. ‡ *Ibid.* pag. 29.

„ THE way that Men are apt to take to pacify
 „ God, is, as Archbishop Tillotson observes, * by some
 „ external piece of Religion. -- Such as were sacri-
 „ fices among the *Jews & Heathens*. -- The *Jews*
 „ pitch'd upon those which were most pompous and
 „ solemn, the richest, & most costly; so they might
 „ but keep their sins, they were well enough content
 „ to offer up any thing else to God; they thought
 „ nothing too good for him, provided he would not
 „ oblige them to become better.

„ AND thus it is among ourselves, when we appre-
 „ hend God is displeas'd with us. -- We are content
 „ to do any thing, but to *learn righteousness*.

„ As to the Church of *Rome*, -- He says, They
 „ (as they pretend) are the most skilful people in the
 „ world to pacify God. -- I do not wrong them by
 „ representing them enquiring after this manner:
 „ Shall I go before a *Crucifix*, and bow myself to it,
 „ as to the *High God*? -- To which of the Saints or
 „ Angels, shall I go to mediate for me, & interceed
 „ on my behalf? Will the Lord be pleas'd with
 „ thousands of *Paternosters*, or with ten thousands of
 „ *Ave-Maries*? Shall the Host travel in Procession,
 „ or myself undertake a tedious *Pilgrimage*? Or shall
 „ I list myself a Soldier for the *Holy War*? Shall I
 „ give my Estate to a *Convent*? Or chastise, & punish
 „ my body for the sin of my soul?

THE Heathen Priests, knowing what would render
 them most acceptable to the People, made the chief
 part of their Religion to consist in gaudy shews,
 pompous ceremonies, and such other tricks as serv'd
 to amuse, and divert them, who, provided they en-
 tertain'd such notions as created a reverence for their
 Priests, & believ'd they could discover to them the
 will of their Gods, might be as leud, and wicked as
 their Gods themselves: „ Are the Gods angry? Must
 „ we repent of our crimes, and re-enter into the

I 2

patris

* Tillotson's Sermon, Vol. 4. p. 5, 6. & to 2. p. 334.

„ paths of Natural Justice to divert their thunder?
 „ Not at all; only take a Calf of such a colour,
 „ calv'd at such a time, & let his throat be cut by a
 „ religious Butcher, in such a dress, with a consecrated
 „ knife, & the Gods, as you will find by the entrails,
 „ will be strait appeas'd.

THE *Mahometans* make the going a Pilgrimage to *Mecca*, the highest act of Religion; and there, out of deep devotion, play many Monkey-tricks, & then, they return cleansed from all impurity. As to the *Jewish* Priests, & the Doctors, who depended on them, we learn from our Saviour, how they made the moral Law void by their vain Traditions; & that the Temple then, as the Church in after-times, was made the grand pretence. And what vile things has not the abus'd name of the Church patronis'd? Nay, even in the best constituted Church, have we not lately had numbers of Men fond of the name of *High-Church*, whose Religion chiefly consisted in drinking for the Church, cursing, swearing, and lying for the Church, raising riots, tumults, & sedition, in favour of a *Popish Pretender*, and all for the security of the *Protestant Church of England*; & in having a profound veneration for black Gowns, no matter what the wearers are; and a great contempt for Men in black cloaks, how deserving soever; and in firmly believing, that those who go to places with steeples can never be in the wrong, & that those who go to places without them can never be in the right; without knowing what either hold, or so much as what is the true meaning of even the word *Church*?

WHAT advantage have not the *Popish* Priests gain'd by their arts of reconciling the practice of vice, with the prospect of Heaven. The *Jesuits*, tho' the youngest Order, yet flourish most, being the most expert in this artifice; as may be seen in *Monsieur Pascal's Provincial Letters*. But all the *Popish* Priests agree, in defending their Superstition by fire & faggot; while their Churches

Churches are open Sanctuaries for the most flagitious; which shews how sensible they are, that Superstition & Immorality support each other. And perhaps, 'tis but reasonable, that the places, where they learn vile things, shou'd protect them, when they have committed the vilest. 'Tis by these means that Holy Church gets a terrible party, who can't refuse to maim or murder, as their spiritual Protectors direct, for fear of being deliver'd up to civil Justice: & not only your mean Rogues, but even the greatest have been frequently screen'd this way.

THE supposing indifferent things equally commanded with matters of morality, tends to make Men believe they are alike necessary: Nay, the former will, by degrees, get the better with the superstitious, and acquire such a veneration by age, as to make Men have recourse to them upon all occasions, tho' ever so unseasonable. If People can be so far impos'd on, as to admit such things into their Religion, they will as easily be persuaded to put a greater stress on things, tho' of small use in Religion, than their nature will bear; to the confounding things of the greatest moment with those of the smallest; & if this is reckon'd Superstition, much more ought the other to be thought so.

THE not distinguishing means from ends, has been the occasion of endless Superstition; and there have been numbers, in all ages, especially of the female Sex, who have thought themselves very religious, if they, tho' to the neglect of their family-concerns, went from Church to Chappel, from Chappel to Church, & were punctual in observing all Church-ceremonies, without regarding the end, for which alone they could be instituted; so that instead of being humble, affable, & good, they have prov'd big with the worst sort of pride, spiritual pride; censuring and despising their neighbours, tho' ever so good, if they were not as punctual as themselves in observing those things;

and the conceit they had of their own godliness, has made them as troublesome at home as abroad, as bad Wives, as Neighbours.

UPON the whole, nothing can be of worse consequence, than thus to depreciate Morality, by mixing things of an indifferent nature with it; because, as experience shews, Men are more or less virtuous according to the value they put on Virtue: & can a Man, who acts contrary to Reason not be an enemy to a Religion founded on Reason? The precepts of natural Religion, & the Rules of right Reason, can't but make strong impressions on rational Creatures: what is fix'd on the minds of Men, & wrought in as it were with their very constitution, can't easily be broke thorow; human-nature is apt to start, and recoil at any such attempt: And yet some have found a most effectual way to break through it, by teaching Men, that the most moral actions, without a right notion forsooth in certain things of another nature, are to be look'd on as *splendida peccata*, & partaking of the nature of sin.

IT is the chief business of preachers, to shew the reasonableness of the Doctrines they teach, as the most effectual way of operating on rational Creatures; and all the Laws of natural Religion being built on their own reasonableness, they, who attend to the dictates of their Reason, can scarce fail to pay a ready and chearful obedience to all its Laws: but when Men take things meerly on authority, & would have taken the contrary on the same authority, Reason is discarded and rational motives cease to operate; nor can Men any longer perform moral duties with a free & chearful mind, but slavishly obey, out of fear, the suppos'd arbitrary commands of a Being, too mighty to be contended with, and that only with a view to atone for Immoralities.

As long as Men believe the good of the Society is the supreme Law, they will think it their duty to be govern'd by that Law; & believing God requires nothing

nothing of them but what is for the good of Mankind; will place the whole of their Religion in benevolent actions, & to the utmost of their abilities copy after the divine original; but if they are made to believe there are things, which have no relation to this good, necessary to salvation, they must suppose it their duty, to use such means as will most effectually serve this purpose, & that God, in requiring the end, requires all those means as will best secure and propagate it.

And,

'Tis to this principle we owe the most cruel Persecutions, Inquisitions, Crusades & Massacres; & that *Princes* have endeavour'd, not only to destroy their Subjects, but to disinherit their own Issue, to make room for supposititious Children. And,

'Tis to this Principle we also owe innumerable tumults, seditions, & rebellions, even against the best of Princes, as well as endless feuds & animosities in private families, and among the nearest relations. They who are govern'd by this Principle can't be good Men, good Subjects, good Citizens, or good Neighbours; no ties of friendship or gratitude, no vows or oaths can bind them, when the interest of such things, as they think they are oblig'd to promote on pain of God's displeasure, requires the contrary conduct.

THE *Jews*, as they were most superstitious, so were they most cruel; and as the *Papists* have, beyond all other Christians, introduc'd into Religion, things which are far from contributing to the good of Mankind; so they have exercis'd a matchless cruelty for the support of them: And no wonder, since their Priests gain by the superstition of the People, & consequently, inspire them with a proportionate hatred against all, who will not comply with it. And,

AMONG *Protestants* of what denomination soever, they who lay the greatest stress on useless speculations, rites, modes & ceremonies, are for the most part sour,

ill-natur'd persons, ready to come into any persecuting measures for their sake: But nothing has done so much mischief as that most monstrous opinion of *Imperium in Imperio*. Those, who pretended to a spiritual Empire, claim'd, as well they might, a divine right to judge of the extent of that Empire, & to do all they judg'd necessary for its support; and consequently, that they had a right, since temporal things must give place to spiritual, to depose the Governors of the State, whenever they judg'd it necessary for the safety of the Church. 'Tis from hence there have been so many tumults, seditions, insurrections, rebellions, civil-wars, murders & massacres upon the pretence of Religion, and which at last ended in the enslaving of the Christian World to the *Pope*, as head of the Church, whose power of deposing heretical Princes, was for many ages universally allow'd; * *no Nation no University declaring against it; nor so much as one Divine, Civilian, or Casuist*. Nor were things mended when, by reason of the great Schisms about the *Papedom*, Councils pretended to govern the Church: † They then carry'd their power to such a height, as dispos'd Princes to enter into agreements with the *Popes*, to whom they yielded a great deal, to be protected in what they had reserv'd to themselves. They, therefore, who maintain, that People may forfeit their properties by *Schism, Heresy, Infidelity*, &c. play the hypocrites, when they pretend the power of Princes is more sacred than the properties of the People, for whose sake they have all their power: And, therefore, we may justly conclude, that they, who are for soliciting Kings, and Magistrates to assist the Church in punishing Misbelievers, are equally enemies to the power of Kings, as well as to the rights of the People; and they have never fail'd to shew it, whenever they have found it their interest.

AND

* *Burnet's Exp. of the Art.* 19. p. 187. — *Ibid.* Art. 21, p. 200. † *Ibid.* Art. 37. p. 385.

AND tho' at first those Princes were idoliz'd, who were the instruments of their cruelty; yet when by their means, the People were intirely at the devotion of the Clergy, they too were soon forc'd to submit; and had just cause to curse their own, & Predecessors bigotry, which enabl'd the *Ecclesiasticks* to insult them as they pleas'd. And what disturbances have not your *Beckets*, *Lands*, &c. created here, when they got into power, & became then as insolent, as before they were submissive. Father *Paul*, no Stranger to our Constitution, in one of his Letters writ in the Reign of King *James I.* says thus; * „ As for the *Engliss*, I am in „ fear; the great Power the Bishops have, tho' under „ a King, makes me very jealous; for should they „ have an easy Prince, or an Archbishop of an high „ spirit, the Kingly power must sink by the Bishops „ aspiring to an absolute dominion.

I believe you will allow, that in the late times, Men were as much in earnest about Religion as ever, & yet by their mixing several things, not of a moral nature with it, & thinking all means proper to promote them lawful, Impiety & Zeal, Bigotry and Hypocrisy, were strangely blended together. And as we are assur'd by an eminent Historian, it was the opinion of *Cromwell*, that † „ the Moral Laws were „ only binding in ordinary cases; but that upon ex- „ traordinary ones these might be superseded; he, & „ that Set of Men, justifying their ill actions from „ the practice of *Ehud* & *Jael*, *Sampson* & *David*.

HERE, indeed, they were no Hypocrites, but frankly confess'd what at the bottom influences all those, who, tho' they have not the grace to own it, make things, not of a moral nature, necessary ingredients of Religion; & thereby give too just occasion

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for

* *Eng. Transl. Pref. pag. 51.* † *Bp. Burnet's Sum. of Affairs before the Restora. pag. 46, - 79.*

for this remark of Archbishop Tillotson, * „ That it „ will be hard to determine, how many degrees of „ innocence & good nature, or of coldness and in- „ difference in Religion, are necessary to overbalance „ the fury of a blind zeal; since several zealots had „ been excellent Men, if their Religion had not hin- „ der'd them, if the doctrines & principles of their „ Church had not spoil'd their natural disposition. „ What can be a greater satyr on any Religion, than „ that it is able to spoil the best disposition, and that „ if it does not make Men arrant Devils, 'tis only be- „ cause Nature is too hard for Principles?

B. THESE sure are uncommon Principles.

A. NOT so uncommon, as you may imagine, „ since all Religion inclines Men to imitate what they „ worship; and they who believe that God will damn „ Men for things *not Moral*, must believe, that in order „ to prevent damnable opinions from spreading, & to „ shew themselves holy, as their heavenly Father is holy; „ they can't shew too much enmity to those, against „ whom God declares an eternal enmity, or plague „ them enough in this life, upon whom in the life to „ come God will pour down the plagues of eternal ven- „ geance. Hence it is, that animosity, enmity, & hatred, „ has over-run the Christian-world, and Men, for the „ sake of these notions, have exercis'd the utmost cruel- „ ties on one another, the most *curst* and *damm'd* „ Churches having always prov'd the most *persecuting*; „ The *Papists*, tho' they declare it to be their duty to „ love their own Enemies, yet looking on all *Protestants* „ as God's Enemies, think it meritorious to murder „ them; and *Protestants* had no sooner renounc'd those „ persecuting Principles of *Papery*, but they too shame- „ fully practis'd the same themselves, for the support „ of such trifling notions, as the publick had not the „ least interest in. And before the happy Revolution, „ the Spirit of Persecution was so outrageous, that *Pro-* „ *testants*

2 Serm. Vol. 3. p. 26, 27. & To. 1. p. 208, 209.

testants ruin'd *Protestants* upon the account of rites, ceremonies, habits, &c. to the great joy of the common Enemy. And,

Tho' there may be, even now, some, who will not forgive their being debarr'd the exercise of their former Tyranny, and wou'd be glad, at any rate, to destroy that hated liberty we are now bleis'd with; yet, I may venture to say, that all; who have so just an opinion of Religion, as to think it requires nothing but what is for the good of Mankind, are to a Man zealous for the present Government establish'd on the principles of civil and religious Liberty.

To preserve which, the Legislature has not only excluded all *Papists*, as Men of persecuting principles from the Crown, but, by affording protection to *Dissenters*, has set the differing Churches in *South* and *North-Britain* on a level; well knowing, that neither Civil nor Ecclesiastical Liberty can be preserv'd on any other foot. Had they gone a step further, and excluded on the strictest tests, Men of persecuting Principles from inferior Posts, as well as the persecuting *Papists* from the highest, they had acted up to those Principles of *Protestantism* upon which the Revolution is founded. And all, who are in earnest about Religion, wou'd have been highly pleas'd to have seen it an establish'd Maxim, that *no Man ought to suffer in his person, his property, or reputation, for his opinion in matters of meer Religion.*

THEY, who think force lawful for the support of such opinions as can't be supported by Reason, (as what Church, when it has power, does not?) can't but think fraud so too; especially when 'tis us'd not only for Mens eternal but temporal good, & to prevent such feverites, as otherwise would be thought *unlawful* & necessary. How can Men of these Principles think any untruth not lawful, when 'tis necessary to guard fundamental Truths? Nay, must they not think it much more their duty to deceive Men,

for

for the sake of their eternal good, than to deceive Children or sick People for an infinitely less good; especially when the temporal interest of the deceivers is join'd with the spiritual interest of the deceiv'd; who, happy Men, have the good luck to be cheated into Paradise, and by the stratagem of a pious fraud to obtain an heavenly Crown? If it be lawful to deceive melancholy persons, who design to poison themselves, and put a remedy in the place of the poison; can any think such an artifice unlawful, when he believes 'tis to hinder millions from imbibing such notions, as are rank poison to their immortal souls?

'Tis with an ill grace that those *Protestants*, who are for restraining the Liberty of the Press, or suffering nothing to be printed, but what has undergone their sponges, rail at the *Papists* for their *Index expurgatorius*: These Men may, indeed, plead authority; since as *Duillé* observes, * „ This opinion has always been „ in the world; that to settle a certain & assur'd estimation upon that which is good and true, (that is „ to say, upon what we account to be such;) it is „ necessary to remove out of the way whatsoever „ may be an hindrance to it: Neither ought we to „ wonder, that even those of the honest, innocent, „ primitive times made use of these deceits, seeing „ for a good end they made no scruple to forge whole „ Books.

THEY, indeed, (& such there are, to the honour of the present time, not a few) who think sincerity will carry Men to Heaven, lie under no temptation no use pious frauds; but for Men of other Principles, tho' they go under the Name of Fathers and Saints, there's no depending on them; since a desire to deceive people into their opinions, will hold in proportion to the zeal they have for propagating those opinions.

* *De usu Patrum* l. 1. c. 3.

IF those Men, in whose hands the sacred Books from time to time have been chiefly deposited, did allow that every Man was to judge for himself of their meaning, in order to make him acceptable to God, there could be no danger of their being designedly corrupted: But if they believ'd, that a certain set of opinions was necessary to salvation, then they must have thought themselves in charity oblig'd, to take the most proper methods to bring Men to embrace them, and consequently, must have believ'd it their duty to substitute some words of their own, which would best express those opinions, on which Mens salvation depended, in the room of others, which were apt to lead them into fatal errors; since by thus changing of sounds, they might save millions of Souls, who, they were confident, would otherwise everlastingly perish. Must not the same Principle, that oblig'd them to impose their own words, instead of the words of God, in their *Creeeds* and *Articles* on pain of damnation, equally oblige them to act the same part in relation to the Scripture? And if Men have stuck so close to this Principle, that they have, (wherever they had a convenient opportunity) left out, added to, or altered all other books of Religion whatever, which have fallen into their hands; there can be no reason to think, they would not do the same with the Bible, where the motives were so much stronger. „ 'Tis no wonder, * says that primitive „ Father, *Dionysius*, Bishop of *Corinth*, that some attempt to adulterate the holy Writings of our Lord, „ since they have basely falsify'd such as are of an „ inferior authority: „ And it must be either to put a stop to, or prevent this practice, that the *Revelation* concludes with a curse on all who should make any alteration in that Book. And 'tis morally impossible, that they, who thought it their duty to commit the most barbarous acts of cruelty for propagating of

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* *Enchiridion*. Eccl. Hist. l. 4. c. 23. in fine.

opinions, shou'd not think it lawful to use deceit for the same end; which they can never imagine to be an evil, while they suppose it so useful for the saving of Mens Souls, without giving up all the other indirect methods, they took to hinder Men from seeing what may be said for, or against any opinions.

NOR is there any one thing in which all parties agree, but in taking it for granted, that their Adversaries will scruple no means to gain credit to their own opinions, or to discredit those of their Adversaries; and in order to it, misrepresent their persons as well as opinions, and make Men Saints or Devils, as it serves their causes: which, as you will find in Church-History, hath afforded a number of miracles for the *Orthodox*, and as many judgments on the *Heterodox*: And if there be miracles on both sides, ours to be sure are divine, and yours diabolical.

IF ever the words of *David*, that *All Men are Liars*, were literally true, it has been in this case; and all History shews the justness of my Lord Bacon's remark:

* *Maxime habenda sunt pro suspectis, quæ pendant quomodocunque a Religione; ut Prodigia Livii.*

THE *Arabian* Writers are full of miracles done by *Mahomet*, which they impose on people, by telling them, that † „ *Mahomet's* Enemies would not invent „ them; & his Friends are forbid telling lies of him „ on pain of damnation.

B. You may make as bold as you will with *Mahometians*, but can you charge Protestant Writers, much less the holy Fathers, with any such practices?

A. I hope, 'tis no crime to take notice, that one of the ten reasons the celebrated *Chillingworth* gives for his turning *Papist*, is, ‡ „ Because the Protestant „ cause is now, and hath been from the beginning, „ maintain'd with gross falsifications and calumnies, „ where-

* *Nov. Org. l. 2. Abb. 29.*

† *Mahom. Life in Eng. before Reland's Mahom. p. 32.*

‡ *Pref.*

„ whereof the prime Controversy-Writers are notoriously, & in a high degree, guilty.„ And upon his return to the Church, he says, *Utiat intra muros peccatur & extra*; which is in plain English, *Priests of all denominations will lie alike*. And I may add, that it is so fully prov'd in the *Historical Essay of the Thirty nine Articles*, that, that clause in the twentieth Article, that *the Church has power to decree Rites & Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith*, had neither the sanction of Parliament or Convocation, that no one has offer'd the least Reply; tho' for the honour of those good Church-men who first forg'd it, and those who since defended it, we might expect all that could be said, tho' the Clause had not given them a power which can only belong to Parliaments, of *decreeing Rites and Ceremonies*, and another power, which can belong to no mortal, *Authority in Controversies of Faith*. What credit ought to be given to the representations of modern Divines, we may, in some measure, learn from a Pamphlet entitul'd, * *The Representation of the present state of Religion; with regard to the late excessive growth of Infidelity, Heresy & Profaneness, as it pass'd the lower House of Convocation*; where there are almost as many notorious falsehoods, as there are paragraphs; not to say any thing of a certain *Pastoral Letter*. And if we look into Church-Story, we shall find it to have been the constant practice of a certain set of Men, not only to impute to their Adversaries opinions which they disown'd, but to represent those opinions as ready to prevail, was it not for their interposition: By which means they hop'd not only to be highly reverenc'd for their great zeal, but to have new powers granted them to oppress Mankind. Thus the consequence of belying the Followers of Wickliff, was the Statute *de Hæretico comburendo*, granted at the petition of the

Clergy;

* See a Pamphlet in two Parts, entitul'd, *The Nation vindicated from the Aspersions cast on it in that Representation*.

Clergy; and the belying the *Albigenses*, *Waldenses*, &c. rais'd a Crusado against those poor people.

As for the holy Fathers, They, as *Daille* * has a whole Chapter to prove, did not think themselves in their controversial writings (and most of theirs were such) oblig'd to speak the truth; but that every thing was lawful which serv'd to gain the victory. They thought they might, by way of oeconomy or dispensation, say one thing & mean the contrary: „ *Origen*, „ *Methodius*, *Eusebius*, *Apollinaris*, (says *St. Jerome*) † „ have writ largely against *Celsus* & *Porphyry*; Do but „ observe, says he, the manner of their arguing, and „ what slippery problems they us'd. They allud'd „ against the *Gentiles*, not what they believ'd, but „ what they thought necessary; *Non quod sentiunt*, „ *sed quod necesse est*, dicunt. And adds, I forbear „ mentioning the Latin-Writers, as *Tertullian*, *Cyprian*, „ *Minutius*, *Victorinus*, *Laëtantius*, and *Hilary*; lest I „ should seem rather to accuse others, than defend „ myself:.. And yet he goes on charging, not only *St. Paul*, but even *Jesus Christ* himself with the same practice. And there was nothing so sacred that could escape being chang'd, either in whole or in part; even the Canons of the famous Council of *Nice*, as well as the Canons of other Councils, have been falsify'd; and those forg'd Canons of *Nice* the *Popes* for many ages impos'd on the *Christian World* as genuine; & the antient *Liturgies*, tho' things of daily use, underwent divers alterations: Nay, even the *Credits* themselves, tho' thought to be the sacred *depositem* of the Faith, have had the same fate. „ 'Tis well known, „ says an eminent Divine, † „ that the *Apostles Creed* „ has receiv'd various additions to the original Form; „ That the *Nicene Creed* was enlarg'd by the *Constantinopolitan* Fathers, & has also, with respect to the „ *Eilioque*, been interpolated by the *Latin Church*; „ that

* *L. 1. c. 6. See p. 159. &c.* † *To. 2. p. 105, 106.*

† *Benner's Directions for studying the 39 Articles, p. 66.*

that 'tis probable, the *Latin Church* has interpolated, the *Athanasian Creed* too, with respect to the *Filio-que*; nay, the *Athanasian Creed* itself, as Bishop *Burnet* * has shown, was a forgery of the eighth Century: Nor did they confine their forgeries to Church matters, but practis'd on the imperial Laws, and inserted in the *Theodosian Code*, † a Rescript of *Constantine*, relating to the power of Bishops, long before repeal'd.

THE further back we go, the greater was their recourse to pious frauds. *Scaliger* speaking of the primitive Christians, says, ‡ *Omnia, quæ putabant Christianismo conducere, libellus interseuerunt.* And as he supposes nothing certain of the Church till the times of *Pliny*, so he says, speaking of the second Century, § *Ad eo verbum Dei inefficax esse censuerunt, ut regnum Christi sine mendacio -- promoveri posse diffiderunt, ut qui utinam illi primum mentiri capissent.* And *Casaubon* says, ¶ *Illud me vehementer movit, quod videam primis Ecclesie temporibus quam plurimos extitisse, qui facinus palmarium judicabant, cœlestem veritatem figmentiis suis ire adiutum; quo facilius nova illa doctrina Gentium sapientibus admitteretur.* And the learned *Blondel* says, ✕
 „ That the second Century of Christianity, whether
 „ you consider the immoderate impudence of Im-
 „ postors, or the deplorable credulity of Believers,
 „ was the most miserable time, & exceeded all others
 „ in holy cheats; and that, to the disgrace of Chri-
 „ stianity, there was a greater aversion to lying, more
 „ fidelity, & a greater simplicity not to depart from
 „ the truth, to be found in profane Authors, than in
 „ the Christian Writers.

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* Art. 8. p. 106. † *Selden's Dissert. on Fleta. c. 5. N. 6.*

‡ *Scaligerana*, Art. Siloe. § *Epist. ad Casaubon*, p. 303.

¶ *Exercit. 1. ad Appendix pag. 54. a. —*

✕ *Epist. ad C. Arnoldum, apud Ouvrages des Savans, Anno 1701. —*

OUR most learned Bishop *Stillington*, says, * „That „ Antiquity is most defective where it is most useful; „ namely, in the times immediately after the Apostles: „ And that the Fathers were often deceiv'd with pious „ frauds; † but then it was when they made for the „ Christians. „ And the pious Bishop *Fell* does not speak quite so tenderly in saying, ‡ *Tanta fuit primis seculis fingendi licentia, tam prona in credendo facilitas, ut rerum gestarum fides exinde graviter laboraverit; nec orbis tantum terrarum, sed & Dei Ecclesia de temporibus suis mysticis merito queratur.*

How unhappy were we of the Laity, had we not the Reason and Nature of things (which no Priests can alter) to depend on; and were intirely oblig'd to take our religious sentiments from Men, who as far as we have any account of things, have, even from the earliest times, not scrupl'd to forge, not only whole passages, but whole books, and lent nothing entire, on which they could lay their foul hands? Which, as that great and honest Critick *Daille* observes, § „ has render'd the writings & venerable monuments „ of antiquity so imbroil'd, & perplex'd, that it will „ be the hardest matter in the world for any Man to „ make out any clear or perfect discovery of those „ things, which so many several Artists have endeavor'd to conceal from us. „ As to this imposing temper of the Ecclesiasticks, I shall only say, that it is plain from History, that the ambitious, domineering part of the Clergy, the imposers of *Creeeds*, *Canons* & *Constitutions*, have prov'd the common plagues of Mankind, and the true authors & fomenters of the most general & most fatal calamities, which have befallen the Christian World. What the consequence was of imposing *Creeeds*, may be learnt from an eminent Father, who flourish'd when this trade of *Creedmaking* was

* *Iren.* pag. 276. † *Orig. Sacr.* pag. 20.

‡ In præmissâ monit. Confess. Suppos. *Cypriani*, p. 53.

§ *De usu Patrum* c. 4. in fine c. 120. --

was at its height. „ It is, *says St. Hilary*, * a thing „ equally deplorable & dangerous, that there are at „ present as many *Creeds*, as there are opinions among „ Men. -- We make *Creeds* arbitrarily, and explain „ them as arbitrarily. -- We can't be ignorant, that „ since the Council of *Nice*.. (there it seems the „ fatal mischief began) „ we have done nothing but „ made *Creeds*. -- We make *Creeds* every year, nay, „ every moon; we repent of what we have done; „ we defend those that repent; we anathematize those „ we have defended; we condemn the doctrine of „ others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; „ and reciprocally tearing one another in pieces, we „ have been the cause of one another's ruin.

Thus you see, how fraud & force are unavoidable, when 'tis believ'd things, having no foundation in Nature or Reason, are necessary parts of Religion; and Ecclesiastical History contains a continued scene of villany, for the support of such notions: And the more good sense, piety, and virtue any Man was endow'd with, the more, if he did not come into those notions, was he hated and persecuted as a most dangerous Enemy. But,

BEFORE I leave this melancholy subject, I must observe, these Men have done their best to justify a remark of *Uriel Acosta*, who, in his *Exemplar vitæ humanæ*, says, † „ That when Men depart ever so little „ from Natural Religion, it is the occasion of great „ strifes and divisions; but if they recede much from „ it, who can declare the calamities which ensue? „ And can Men more depart from it, than by imposing on their Brethren, either by fraud, or force, things no ways tending to the good of Mankind?

Tho' we cry up the great advantage we have above all other Animals, in being capable of Religion, yet those Animals we despise for want of it, herd

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* *Hil. ad Constant. p. 217. Basil Edit. al. p. 211, 212 -*

† *P. 351. sub finem Amic. Cellat. Limberch.*

most socially together; except such carnivorous Creatures which necessity separates. The *Ants*, notwithstanding they have stings, are crouded in vast numbers in the same hillock; &, having all things in common, seem to have no other contention among them, but who shall be most active in carrying on the common interest of their small Republick. And much the same may be said of *Bees*, and other Animals; yet Men, tho' they can't subsist but in society, and have hands, speech, & reason to qualify them for the blessing of it above all other Animals, nay, what is more, have Religion, design'd to unite them in the firm bonds of Love & Friendship, and to engage them to vie with one another in all good offices (and the good natur'd Laity too have, at a vast expence, hir'd persons to inculcate these generous notions) yet alas! in spite of all these helps & motives, Religion has been made by these very persons, a pretence to render Men unlovable, fierce, and cruel, and to act every thing destructive to their common welfare: And the greater the number of these religious, & the more expence people have been at in maintaining them, the more of these mischiefs have they most ungratefully occasion'd to their generous benefactors.

B. GRANTING that a deluge of every thing that's ill has overflow'd *Christendom*, & does so still in most places; and that Religion has been made a handle for such barbarities, as human-nature, left to itself, would startle at, yet how is this to be remedy'd?

A. EDUCATION is justly esteem'd a second nature, & its force so strong, that few can wholly shake off its prejudices, even in things unreasonable & unnatural, and must it not have the greatest efficacy in things agreeable to Reason, and suitable to humane-nature? Let those, therefore, who have the education of Youth, recommend Morality as the end of all Religion, and let every thing not tending to promote the Honour of God and the Good of Man, be accounted

by all his actions, especially, by his late monstrous practices, shew'd how firmly he believ'd his own doctrine, & how resolv'd he was, that Virtue shou'd not make his present life miserable.

B. I grant you, 'tis of the utmost consequence to the Common-wealth, that Youth shou'd be rightly instructed in all such principles as promote the common good, but can you imagine Pagan Philosophers cou'd infuse more generous sentiments into them, than Christian Clergy-men?

A. I do not think so, when they are such Clergy-men as those who at present have the instructing our Youth, otherwise I can't help giving into the sentiments of a noble Author, who, speaking of the education of Youth, when instructed by Philosophers, says, * „ It tended to make them as useful to the „ Society they liv'd in as possible. There they were „ train'd up to exercise & labour, to accustom themselves to an active life, no Vice was more infamous „ than sloth, nor any Man more contemptible, than „ he who was too lazy to do all the good he could. „ The lectures of their Philosophers serv'd to quicken „ them up to this, they recommended above all „ things the duty to their Country, the preservation „ of the Laws and publick Liberty, subservient to „ which they preach'd up moral Virtues, such as fortitude, temperance, justice, a contempt of death, &c. „ They taught their Youth how, and when to speak „ pertinently; how to act like Men, to subdue their „ passions, to be publick-spirited; to despise death, „ torments and reproach, riches, and the smiles of „ Princes as well as their frowns, if they stood between them & their duty. This manner of education produc'd Men of another stamp than appears „ now upon the theatre of the World, such as we „ are scarce worthy to mention, & must never think „ to imitate, till the like manner of institution grows „ again

* Preface to the Account of Denmark.

„ again into reputation; which in enslav'd Countries
 „ 'tis never like to do, as long as the Ecclesiasticks,
 „ who have an opposite interest, keep not only the
 „ education of Youth, but the consciences of old Men
 „ in their hands.

B. THIS, I confess, is the right way to prevent immorality; but if every thing, as you contend, ought to be look'd on as superstitious which is not of a moral nature, Superstition has spread itself over the face of the earth, & prevail'd more or less in all times & places.

A. THIS is no more than what has been own'd long ago by a very good Judge, who says, * *Superstitio supra per gentes, oppressit omnium serè animos, atque hominum occupavit imbecillitatem.* And the universality of Superstition is in effect own'd by every Sect, in affirming that Superstition is crept into all other Sects, & that 'tis the chief business of their respective Teachers to promote it: And is it possible to be otherwise, as long as Men are taught to build their Religion on a narrower foundation, than that on which the universal Being has universally laid it?

'Tis the observation of *Naturalists*, that there is no species of creatures, but what have some innate weakness, which makes them an easy prey to other Animals, that know how to make their advantage of it: Now the peculiar foible of Mankind is Superstition, which at all times has made them liable to be practis'd on, not by creatures of different species, but by those of their own; who, by a confident pretence of knowing more than their neighbours, have first circumvented the many, the credulous & unwary, and afterwards forc'd the free-thinking few into an outward compliance: And as far as we have an account of things, we shall find that most of the prevailing Superstitions have been erected on this foundation and to it owe their whole support. And whoever knows any thing

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of *France & Italy*, not to mention other Countries, can't but know that the better sort are sensible of the prevailing absurdities; but, over-aw'd by the Priests & mob, are forc'd to submit. And,

THE more Superstition the people have, the easier they may be impos'd on by designing Ecclesiasticks; and the less Religion the Clergy have, the more unanimous they will be in carrying on their common interest: and when the Clergy are without Religion, and the People abound in Superstition, the Church, you may be sure, is in a flourishing condition; but in great danger, when Men place their Religion in Morality: For then all indifferent things are look'd on as they are in their own nature, indifferent; then the People have no superstitious veneration for the persons of Men, & the Clergy are esteem'd only in proportion to the good they do; and every evil they commit is reckon'd a breach of trust, they being maintain'd by the People chiefly to set them good examples. But this method of gaining all that reverence & authority they pretend to, has, it seems, been thought too laborious & servile. They have (I mean where *Papery* prevails) as masters of the religious ceremonies, most effectually gain'd their end, by introducing such things into Religion, as have promoted a superstitious veneration to themselves; and made people believe, that the chief means to obtain their *eternal* happiness, were of a different nature from those which cou'd their *temporal* happiness, and only to be dispens'd by them, in order to get the sole management of *spirituals* to themselves; and consequently, (since there can't be at the same time two supreme Powers) of temporals *also*: And so well have they succeeded, that, in most places, the temporal interest of the Clergy passes for the spiritual of the Laity.

THERE are two ways which never fail to make Superstition prevail; mysteries to amuse the enthusiasts, especially the pretenders to deep learning, and all

all that admire what they do not understand; & gaudy shews & pompous ceremonies, to bewitch the vulgar: And the *Papish* Church, whose conduct shews how well they understand their interest, may vie with the old *Egyptian* Church for mysteries; and *Pagan Rome* must yield to *Christian Rome* in such shews, rites, and ceremonies as dazzle the eyes of the people, & insensibly gain their hearts: and the more there are of these in any Church, the more the Clergy, the holy dispensers of them, are reverenc'd, not to say, ador'd by the unthinking multitude, as they are in the Church of *Rome*. * „ That Church has, as *Archbishop Tillotson* „ *observes*, weaken'd the force of Christianity upon „ the hearts & lives of Men, by amusing them with „ *external rites*, which they have multiply'd to that „ excessive degree, as to make the *Yoke* of Christ „ really *heavier* than that of *Moses*; and the Christian „ Religion a more *external* and *carnal commandment* „ than that of the Law; & have diverted the minds „ of Men from the main design of Christianity. -- „ They have had no leisure to think of being good „ Men, & to mind the *great & substantial* duties of „ the Christian Life -- The *Simplicity* of the *Christian* „ *wisdom* they have incumber'd with so many fri- „ voious *rites* and *observances*, as not only render it „ more burthenfom, but less apt to make Men in- „ wardly, & *substantially* good, than *Judaism* itself.

THIS great Man observes, that † „ Those things „ which are agreeable to our nature, our reason, and „ our interest, are the great things which our Reli- „ gion requires of us. -- And that Mankind might „ have no pretence left to excuse them from these, „ the Christian Religion has set us free from those „ many outward positive observances, that the *Jewish* „ Religion was incumber'd withal; that we might „ be wholly intent on these great duties, and mind

K. 5 nothing

* To. 2. pag. 360.

† *Serm. Vol. 4. pag. 37. & To. 2. pag. 341.*

„ nothing in comparison of the real, and substantial „ virtues of a good life. „ If so, can we suppose the Christian Religion has superadded any outward positive things of its own, to hinder us from being wholly intent on these duties?

THE Popish Priests are so far from giving the People any just idea of God, that they represent him as an arbitrary & tyrannical Being, imposing, on the highest pain, the practice of ridiculous ceremonies, & the belief of absurd doctrines; as a fantastical Being, angry without cause, & pleas'd without reason; as a vain-glorious Being, fond of having his Ministers & Favourites, that is, themselves, live in pomp, splendor, & luxury, to the miserable oppression of the People. But 'tis no wonder, that they are made to believe, that God requires the observing indifferent things on the severest penalties; since their Priests claim the same power, in making such things necessary to the communicating in their holy Church, out of which, they affirm, salvation is not to be had. I wish I could say, the Popish Priests only were guilty of this horrid impiety, & that some others had not been as zealous for imposing such things, by making them necessary terms of communion, & damning those that durst not comply with them; & who seem to be of the same Spirit with the famous Bishop Gunning, * who, when the Presbyterians urg'd that *Light*, *Holy Water*, & such like, might as well be impos'd as the *Cross* and *Surplice*; reply'd, *The more the better*. But if external rites, as Archbishop Tillotson observes, *have eat out the heart of Religion in the Church of Rome*, by parity of reason, Religion should seem to have made the deepest impression on the *Quakers*, who are the most averse to things of this nature, and are therefore hated by the *Formalists* of all Churches.

B. Sensible things make a deeper impression on the minds of the common People than words; & therefore

* Life of Baxter c. 8. p. 175: Calamy's Abridgment.

fare, the using symbolical representations being for the advantage of Religion, why may they not be ordain'd of God?

A. IF you must have recourse to words, to explain the signification of such symbols, are they not arbitrary marks, whose meaning cannot be known, but from words; and, not being capable of expressing things more fully than words, wholly needless as to that purpose? Nay, words themselves being but arbitrary signs, to multiply such signs needlessly would be very absurd.

As to sensible things making a deeper impression on the common people, that, I presume, is a just reason against their use in Religion; because the vulgar, who generally look no further than externals, do not use them barely, as they do words, to express their meaning, but conceive in them, I know not what internal holiness, and think such symbolical representations as necessary as the things represented by them; nay, by degrees, forgetting the reason of their institution, come to idolize them, as the *Israelites* did the brazen Serpent: And this the People have always done in all Religions whatever, where these symbolical representations have been used.

THE chief cause of the *Egyptians* falling into grosser Idolatries than other less knowing Nations, was, no doubt, owing to the use of *Hieroglyphicks* in their religious worship: An Ox, that laborious and useful animal, was at first only a symbolical representation; the meaning of which, the People in time forgetting, fell to down-right adoring the beast; and, perhaps, it was for the same reason that *Leeks* & *Onions*, and other garden-stuff came likewise to be worshipped. But without looking into the *Pagan* world, & shewing by what degrees they came to worship those sensible representations, statues and images, whoever reflects on the use the *Papists* have made of such things, must see how fatal it is to bring them into Religion: The
Images

Images & Pictures of Saints, and Crosses were first introduced, on pretence, that being sensible representations, they might serve to excite peoples devotion; but that end was soon forgotten, & the superstitious Vulgar worshipp'd the very Images, Pictures, & Crosses. I need not tell you what *Transubstantiation*, *Consubstantiation*, *Real Presence*, & other absurdities of that nature are owing to; and what mischiefs they have occasion'd: But supposing such symbolical representations might be occasionally used, is it not, for the reasons already given, incumbent on the parties concern'd, to appoint, alter, and vary them as occasion requires?

B. If God has delegated to the Clergy a power to consecrate Persons & things, can any, whether Prince or People, dispense with this power, and substitute things unconsecrated?

A. As God alone is absolutely holy, so Men may be said to be more or less holy, according as they imitate him; and as this holiness consists in a good & pious disposition of mind, so Mens actions are no otherwise holy, but as they flow from, and are signs of this holy disposition. Inanimate things can only be said to have a relative holiness, as made use of in actions, by which Men express that holy disposition of mind; and can last no longer than they are thus employ'd. What holiness, either real or relative, would the Ark now have? tho' it once had such a legal holiness, that more than fifty thousand Reapers were destroy'd for peeping into it. * Nay, Persons who want all real holiness, may yet have a relative holiness, as Ministers employ'd by the Congregation about holy things; but this can be no more than a derivative holiness, & can last no longer than the holy action they are about; and belongs equally to those from whom 'tis deriv'd. Thus all the relative holiness which concerns publick worship, whether as to persons, places,

* 1 Sam. 6. 19.

places, or things, must be deriv'd from the Congregation; and nothing sure, can be more absurd, than to imagine the Clergy, by any form of words, can bestow any permanent holiness, whether real or relative, on timber, stone, &c. And therefore, the method us'd by Archbishop Leud, in consecrating of a Church, was generally cry'd out on as profane, and tending to justify those Consecrations us'd in the *Greek & Latin Churches*, whereby they cheat the People of immense sums. But 'tis no wonder, if they, who claim this power in relation to inanimate things, shou'd pretend to convey to Men, tho' ever so wicked, a real inherent, nay, *indelible* holy character; tho' wherein that consists, they themselves can't tell. But,

WHAT the Priests aim at by this cant, is to make People believe their prayers are of greater efficacy than those of the unsanctify'd Laity; very well knowing, that if the People were so weak as to believe it, they wou'd be thought necessary on all occasions, especially to persons on their death-beds. What advantages they have made by being then thought thus necessary, none can be ignorant of. I do not wonder, that so loose an haranguer as St. Chrysostom shou'd say, *The prayers of the People, which are weak in themselves, laying hold on the more prevailing prayers of the Priests, may, by them, be convey'd to Heaven.* But I admire, that the judicious Bishop Potter, * the King's Professor of Divinity at Oxford, should maintain the same position, & think to support it by this Father's authority. But this is modest in comparison of what Hicks, Brett, & others of that stamp, assign to Priests, in supposing they have such transcendent privileges by virtue of their *indelible* character, that they can bless, or curse *authoritatively*; nay, that their very prayers to God himself are *authoritative Prayers*.

B. Tho' some have had too little regard for Natural Religion, as being too stubborn to yield to any selfish

selfish views, yet that will not justify you for leveling your arguments against the divine Omnipotency. Are we not God's Creatures, & may not our Creator give us what arbitrary Commands he pleases?

A. NOT to repeat what I have said already, I shall only ask you, Why may not God deceive us? Tell us one thing, & act the contrary? Is not his Power absolute? And *his Will, who can resist?* Would you not reply, that God as he is infinitely good & happy, can have no motive to deceive us? And that he could do whatever he thought fit for the good of his Creatures, without having recourse to such mean shifts? And will not this reason equally hinder him from burthening us with arbitrary Commands? Is not one as much as the other, inconsistent with his Wisdom & Goodness, by which his Power is always directed? And of the two, it shou'd seem less absurd, that God might deceive People for their good, than impose arbitrary things on them for their hurt, by annexing severe penalties on non-observance.

B. MAY not God give us arbitrary Commands to try our obedience?

A. A MAN, who knows not the hearts of others, nor foresees how they will act, may think it prudent to try people in things of little or no moment, before he trusts them in greater; but God, who foreknows what Men will do on all occasions, can need no such trial. If earthly Kings, who may be deceiv'd, & for the most part are so, wou'd be justly esteem'd Tyrants, if they required things of their Subjects merely to try their obedience, how can we think this of the Omniscient, infinitely Glorious King of Kings? Tho' was a trial necessary, moral & immoral things wou'd be the most proper subjects for it; because we can't practise one, or refrain from the other, without subduing our lusts & passions: But what speculative articles will not an ill Man profess? Or what indifferent things will he not practise, to be indulg'd in any one darling vice?

AND

AND now don't you think we may justly conclude, that whatsoever God requires of us to believe, or practise, is purely for our good; and consequently, that no belief, or practise, which does not contribute to that good, can come from God; and therefore, as long as we adhere to what Reason reveals to us concerning the Goodness of God, by admitting every thing into Religion which makes for the Good of Man, & nothing that does not, we can't mistake our duty either to God, or Man.

AND therefore, I shall conclude this head with a quotation from a noble Author, * „ To believe, „ that every thing is govern'd, order'd, or regulated „ *for the best*, by a designing Principle, or Mind, necessarily good and permanent, is to be a perfect „ THEIST.

„ To believe no one supreme designing Principle, „ or Mind, but rather two, three, or more, (tho' in „ their nature good) is to be a POLYTHEIST.

„ To believe the governing Mind, or Minds, not „ absolutely & necessarily good, nor confin'd to what „ is best, but capable of acting according to meer will „ or fancy, is to be a DEMONIST.

* *Characterist.* Vol. x. pag. 11.

CHAP. XII.

That they, who, to magnify Revelation, weaken the force of the Religion of Reason & Nature, strike at all Religion: and that there can't be two independent Rules for the government of human actions.

E. I N my opinion, you lay too great stress on fallible Reason, & too little on infallible Revelation: And, therefore, I must needs say, your arguing wholly from Reason would make some of less candor than myself, take you for an arrant *Free-Thinker*.

A.

4. **WHATSOEVER** is true by Reason, can never be false by Revelation; & if God can't be deceiv'd himself, or be willing to deceive Men, the light he hath given to distinguish between religious truth & falsehood, cannot, if duly attended to, deceive them in things of so great moment.

THEY, who do not allow Reason to judge in matters of opinion, or speculation, are guilty of as great absurdity as the *Papists*, who will not allow the senses to be judges in the case of *Transubstantiation*, tho' a matter directly under their cognizance: nay, the absurdity, I think, is greater in the first case; because Reason is to judge, whether our senses are deceiv'd; and if no texts ought to be admitted as a proof in a matter contrary to sense, they ought, certainly, as little to be admitted in any point contrary to Reason.

In a word, to suppose any thing in Revelation inconsistent with Reason, & at the same time, pretend it to be the will of God, is not only to destroy that proof, on which we conclude it to be the will of God, but even the proof of the being of a God; since if our reasoning faculties duly attended to can deceive us, we can't be sure of the truth of any one proposition, but every thing wou'd be alike uncertain, and we shou'd for ever fluctuate in a state of universal scepticism. Which shews how absurdly they act, who, on pretence of magnifying Tradition, endeavour to weaken the force of Reason, (tho' to be sure they always except their own,) and thereby foolishly sap the foundation, to support the superstructure. But as long as Reason is against Men, they will be against Reason. We must not, therefore, be surpris'd, to see some endeavour to reason Men out of their Reason; tho' the very attempt to destroy Reason by Reason, is a demonstration Men have nothing but Reason to trust to. And,

AND

AND to suppose any thing can be true by Revelation, which is false by Reason, is not to support that thing, but to undermine Revelation; because nothing unreasonable, nay, that is not highly reasonable, can come from a God, of unlimited, universal, and eternal Reason. As evident as this Truth is, yet that shall not hinder me from examining in a proper place, whatever you can urge from Revelation. And give me leave to add, that I shall not be surpris'd, if for so laudable an attempt, as reconciling Reason & Revelation, which have been so long set at variance, I should be censur'd as a *Free-Thinker*; a title, that, however invidious it may seem, I am far from being ashamed of; since one may as well suppose, a Man can reason without thinking at all, as reason well without thinking freely. But,

THE irreconcilable enemies of Reason, seeing it too gross, in this reasoning Age, to attack Reason openly, do it covertly under the name of *Free-Thinking*; not despairing, but that the time may come again, when the Lusty shall fill every thought rising in their minds, tho' with ever so much appearance of truth, as a suggestion of Satan, if it clashes with the real, or pretended opinions of their Priests.

B. Tho' you talk so much about Reason, yet you have not defin'd what you mean by that word.

A. WHEN we attribute any operation to it, as distinguishing between truth & falsehood, &c. we mean by it the rational faculties; but when we ascribe no such operation to it, as when we give a reason for a thing, &c. we then understand by it, any medium, by which our rational faculties judge of the agreement, or disagreement of the terms of any proposition; and if an Author writes intelligibly, we may easily discern in which of these two senses he takes the word. But to go to the bottom of this matter, it will be requisite to give a more distinct account of Reason in both these senses. By the rational faculties

ties then, we mean the natural ability a Man has to *apprehend, judge, and infer*: The *immediate objects* of which faculties are, not the things themselves, but the *ideas* the mind conceives of them: While our *ideas* remain single, they fall under the *apprehension*, & are express'd by *simple terms*; when join'd, under the *judgment*, & are express'd by *propositions*; when so join'd as to need the *intervention* of some other *idea* to compare 'em with, in order to form a *judgment*, they become by that *intervention*, the subject of *inference*, or *argumentation*; and this is term'd, *sylogism* or *argument*. It must be observ'd too, that all the *ideas* we have, or can have, are either by *sensation* or *reflection*: by the first, we have our *ideas* of what passes, or exists without; by the second, of what passes, or exists within the mind: And in the view, or contemplation of these consists all our knowledge; that being nothing but the *perception* of the *agreement*, or *disagreement* of our *ideas*; & any two of these, when join'd together, so as to be affirm'd or deny'd of each other, make what we call a *proposition*; when consider'd apart, what we call the *terms* of that *proposition*; the *agreement*, or *disagreement* of which *terms* being express'd by the rightly affirming, or denying 'em of each other, is what we call *Truth*; the perception of their agreement or disagreement, is what we term *knowledge*. This knowledge accrues either immediately on the bare intuition of these two *ideas*, or *terms* so join'd, & is therefore styl'd *intuitive knowledge*, or, self-evident *truth*; or by the intervention of some other *idea*, or *ideas*, as a common measure for the other two, & is therefore call'd the *medium*, by which Reason judges of their agreement, or disagreement; & this is called *demonstrative knowledge*, which is never to be had without the help of the other. For,

If there were not some propositions which need not to be prov'd, it would be in vain for Men to argue with one another, because they then could bring no proofs

proofs but what needed to be prov'd. -- Those propositions which need no proof, we call self-evident; because by comparing the ideas signify'd by the terms of such propositions, we immediately discern their agreement, or disagreement: This is, as I said before, what we call intuitive knowledge, & is the knowledge of God himself, who sees all things by intuition; and may, I think, be call'd *divine inspiration*, as being immediately from God, and not acquir'd by any human deduction, or drawing of consequences. This, certainly, is that divine, that uniform Light, which shines in the minds of all men, and enables them to discern whatever they do discern; since without it there could be no Demonstration, no Knowledge, but invincible obscurity, & universal uncertainty.

-- WHERE a proposition can't be made evident, by comparing the two ideas, or terms of it with each other, it is render'd so by intermediate ideas or terms, whereby the agreement, or disagreement of the ideas under examination, or the truth of that proposition is perceiv'd; and when there is an intuitive perception of the agreement, or disagreement of the intermediate ideas in each step of the progression, then, and not till then, it becomes demonstrative Knowledge; otherwise it can rise no higher than probability, which consists not in a certain, but a likely connexion between the terms of a proposition, & the intermediate proofs of it: So that every proposition that's only probable, must have a proportionable degree of uncertainty, otherwise it would amount to demonstration; & consequently, Probability, as well as Certainty, is founded on the relation it has to self-evident truths; because where no relation to them of any sort can be discover'd, there is no room for Certainty, or Probability.

HENCE we see that all wrong reasoning is the effect of rashness, and consists either in taking propositions to have a certain connexion with self-evident truths,

truths; when they have but a probable one, or imagining there's a probable connexion, when there's no connexion at all, or else mistaking the degrees of probability.

B. THE *Quakers* are very positive, that there is in all Mankind, a principle of action distinct from Reason, (& which is not inspiration) by which all are to be govern'd in matters of Religion, as they are by Reason in other matters, and which they commonly call *the Light within*.

A. WAS there any such principle, Men destitute of all Reason were as capable of knowing all matters of Religion, as if they had been ever so rational. 'Tis strange, that all Mankind shou'd have a principle of acting, of which they never were sensible; nor can these modern discoverers tell them what it is, or how it operates; nor do they themselves ever use it in any of their debates about Religion, but argue like other Men from principles that are common to all Mankind, & prove propositions that are not self-evident by those that are so; and confute false & bad reasons (of which they can only judge by Reason) by true and good reasons; which supposes that Reason, however fallible it may be, is all rational Creatures have to trust to; and that 'tis the highest commendation of Religion, that it is a *reasonable service*. And since this is an Age, where words without meaning, or distinctions without difference, will not pass current, why shou'd they, who otherwise appear to have good sense, thus impose on themselves, and be expos'd by others, for such senseless notions, as can only serve to prejudice people against their other rational principles? But 'tis the fate of most Sects to be fondest of their ugliest traits. But not to deviate,

WERE it not for those self-evident notions, which are the foundation of all our reasonings, there could be no intellectual communication between God and Man; nor, as we are fram'd, can God ascertain us

of any truth, but by shewing its agreement with those self-evident notions, which are the tests by which we are to judge of every thing, even the Being of a God and Natural Religion; which, tho' not knowable by intuition, are to be demonstrated by such proofs, which have, mediatly or immediately, a necessary connexion with our self-evident notions. And therefore, to weaken the force of demonstration, is to strike at all Religion, & even at the Being of God; and not to give probability its due weight, is to strike at the authority of that Revelation you contend for; because, that God reveal'd his Will by *visions, dreams, trances*, or any other way besides the light of Nature, can only come under the head of Probability. And,

If it be but probable, that God made any external Revelation at all, it can be but probable, tho' perhaps, not in the same degree of probability, that he made this or that Revelation: And this evidence all pretend to, since, perhaps, there never was a time or place, where some external Revelation was not believ'd, & its Votaries equally confident, that theirs was a true Revelation: And, indeed, the prodigious numbers of Revelations, which from time to time have been in the world, shew how easily Mankind may in this point be impos'd on: And as there can be no demonstration of the Revelation itself, so neither can there be any of its conveyance to posterity; much less that this or that, has been convey'd entire to distant times & places, especially, if a Revelation be of any bulk, and which may have gone thorow the hands of Men, who not only in the dark ages of the Church, but even in the beginning, if we judge by the number of corrupted passages, and even forg'd books, were capable of any pious fraud. Nay, the very nature of Probability is such, that were it only left to time itself, even that wou'd wear it quite out; at least if it be true what *Mathematicians* pretend to demonstrate, viz. That the probability of facts depending on human

testimony; must gradually lessen in proportion to the distance of the time when they were done. And we have a Reverend Divine, * who has publish'd, as he thinks, a demonstration of this, with relation to facts recorded in Scripture, and has gone so far, as to fix the precise time, when all probability of the truth of the history of Christ, will be entirely spent, and exhausted.

ARCHBISHOP *Laud* says, † that „ the assent we „ yield to this main point of Divinity, that the „ Scripture is the word of God, is grounded on no „ compelling or demonstrative ratiocination, but relies „ on the strength of Faith more than any one principle whatever. „ And by the confession of the best *Protestant* Writers, the internal excellency of the Christian doctrines is the main proof of their coming from God; and therefore, Mr. *Chillingworth* says, ‡ „ For my part, I profess, if the Doctrine of the „ Scripture was not as good, & as fit to come from „ God, the fountain of Goodness, as the miracles, „ by which it was confirm'd, were great, I should „ want one main-pillar of my faith, and for want „ of it, I fear, should be much stagger'd in it.

THIS, I think, may be sufficient to shew, what a folly they are guilty of, who, in order to advance the credit of Revelation, endeavour to weaken the force of Reason.

B. I don't think, we ought to have the same regard for Reason, as Men had formerly, when that was the sole Rule God had given them for the government of their actions; since now we Christians have two supreme, independant Rules, *Reason* and *Revelation*, and both require an absolute obedience.

* *Craig's Principia Mathematica Theologiae Christianae*, pag. 23. - & d. Edit. *Londoni* 1699.

† *Laud* against *Fisher*, pag. 110.

‡ *Relig. Protest. Part. 1. cap. 2. pag. 53.*

A. I can't see how that is possible; for if you are to be govern'd by the latter, that supposes you must take every thing on trust, or meerly because it's said by those, for whose dictates you are to have an implicit faith; for to examine into the truth of what they say, is renouncing their authority: As on the contrary, if Men are to be govern'd by their Reason, they are not to admit any thing further than as they see it reasonable. To suppose both consistent, is to suppose it consistent to take, and not to take, things on trust.

To receive Religion on the account of authority supposes, that if the same authority promulgated a different Religion, we shou'd be oblig'd to receive it: And indeed, it's an odd jumble, to prove the truth of a book by the truth of the doctrines it contains, & at the same time conclude those doctrines to be true, because contain'd in that book; & yet this is a jumble every one makes, who contends for Mens being absolutely govern'd both by Reason & Authority.

WHAT can be a fuller evidence of the sovereignty of Reason, than that all Men, when there is any thing in their traditional Religion, which in its literal sense can't be defended by Reason, have recourse to any method of interpretation, tho' ever so forc'd, in order to make it appear reasonable. And do not all parties, when press'd, as they are all in their turns, say with *Tertullian*, „we ought to interpret Scripture, not by „ the sound of words, but by the nature of things. „ *Malo te ad sensum rei, quam ad sonum vocabuli exercitas.* * But sometimes the letter of the Scripture is such an authority, as can't be parted with without sacrilege, and sometimes 'tis a *letter which killeth*.

It is a word, when Men, in defending their own, or attacking other traditionary Religions, have recourse to the Nature or Reason of Things, does not that shew, they believe the truth of all traditionary

Religion is to be try'd by it; as being that, which must tell them what is true or false in Religion? And were there not some truths relating to Religion of themselves so evident, as that all must agree in them; nothing relating to Religion cou'd be prov'd, every thing wou'd want a further proof; and if there are such evident truths, must not all others be try'd by their agreement with them? And are not these the tests, by which we are to distinguish the only true Religion from the many false ones? And do not all alike own, there are such tests drawn from the nature of things, each crying their Religion contains every thing worthy, and nothing unworthy of having God for its Author; thereby confessing, that Reason enables them to tell what is worthy of having God for its Author: And if Reason tells them this, does it not tell them every thing that God can be suppos'd to require?

In short, nothing can be more certain, than that there are some things in their own nature good, some evil, and others neither good nor evil; and for the same reason God commands the good, & forbids the evil, he leaves Men at liberty in things indifferent; it being inconsistent with his wisdom to reward the observance of such things, and with his goodness to punish for not observing them. And as he cou'd have no end in creating Mankind, but their common good, so they answer the end of their creation, who do all the good they can; and to enable Men to do this, God has given them Reason to distinguish Good from Evil, useful from useless things: Or in other words, has made them moral agents, capable of discerning the relations they stand in to God and one another, & the duties resulting from these relations, so necessary to their common good: And consequently, Religion, thus founded on these immutable relations, must at all times, & in all places, be alike immutable; since external Revelation, not being able to make any

change in these relations, & the duties that necessarily result from them, can only recommend, & inculcate these duties; except we suppose, that God at last acted the Tyrant, and impos'd such Commands, as the relations we stand in to him, & one another, no ways require.

To imagine any external Revelation not to depend on the Reason of Things, is to make Things give place to Words, and implies, that from the time this Rule commenc'd; we were forbid to act as moral agents, in judging what is good, or evil, fit, or unfit; and that we are to make no other use of our Reason, than to see what is the literal meaning of texts, & to admit that only to be the will of God, tho' ever so inconsistent with the Light of Nature, & the eternal Reason of Things. Is not this to infer, there's nothing good or evil in itself, but that all depends on the Will of an arbitrary Being, which, tho' it may change every moment, is to be unalterably found in such a Book?

ALL Divines, I think, now agree in owning, that there's a Law of Reason, antecedent to any external Revelation, that God can't dispense, either with his Creatures or himself, for not observing; and that no external Revelation can be true, that in the least circumstance, or minutest point, is inconsistent with it. If so, how can we affirm any one thing in Revelation to be true, till we perceive, by that understanding, which God has given us to discern the truth of things, whether it agrees with this immutable Law, or not?

If we can't believe otherwise than as things appear to our understandings, to suppose God requires us to give up our understandings (a matter we can't know but by using our understanding) to any authority whatever, is to suppose he requires impossibilities. And our self-evident notions being the foundation of all certainty, we can only judge of things, as they are found to be more or less agreeable to them.

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To deny this on any pretence wharever, can serve only to introduce an universal Scepticism. And therefore Bishop *Taylor* very justly observes, * „Tis Reason „ that is the Judge, and Fathers, Councils, Tradition, „ & Scripture the Evidence. „ And if Reason be the Judge, can it form a right judgment, without examining into every thing which offers itself for evidence? And wou'd it not examine in vain, if it had not certain tests, by which it cou'd try all evidences relating to religious matters.

B. T u o' Reason may be the Judge, yet the Scripture, we say, is the Rule, by which Reason must judge of the truth of things.

A. I f it be such a Rule, must it not have all the qualifications necessary to make it so? But if Reason must tell us what those qualifications are, & whether they are to be found in Scripture, & if one of those qualifications is, that the Scripture must be agreeable to the nature of things, does not that suppose the nature of things to be the standing Rule, by which we must judge of the truth of all those Doctrines contain'd in the Scriptures? So that the Scripture can only be a secondary rule, as far as it is found agreeable to the nature of things, or to those self-evident notions, which are the foundation of all knowledge, & certainty.

I N short, no Man can any more discern the objects of his own understanding, & their relations, by the faculties of another, than he can see with another Man's eyes; or than one Ship can be guided by the Helm of another: And therefore, he, who demands a Man's assent to any thing, without conveying into his mind such reasons as may produce a sense of the truth of it, erects a tyranny over his understanding, & demands an impossible tribute. No opinion, tho' ever so certain to one Man, can be infus'd into another as certain, by any method, but by opening his understanding,

* *Polem. Disco.* pag. 507.

standing, so that he may find the reasonableness of it in his own mind; & consequently, the only *Criterion*; by which he tries his own reasonings, must be the internal evidence he has already of certain truths, & the agreeableness of his inferences to them. And,

To suppose a Creature to have Reason to direct him, and that he is not to be directed by it, is a contradiction: and if we are religious as we are rational, can Religion oblige us not to be govern'd by Reason, tho' but for a moment? Nay, what is the Religion of all rational Beings, but what the Scripture terms it, a *reasonable service*? Or, their Reason employ'd on such subjects, as conduce to the dignity of the rational nature? So that Religion & Reason were not only given for the same end, the good of Mankind, but they are, as far as such subjects extend, the same, & commence together. And if God can no otherwise apply to Men, but by applying to their Reason, (which he is continually doing by the Light of Nature) does he not by that bid them use their Reason? And can God at the same time forbid it, by requiring an implicit faith in any person whatever?

If you allow, that Men by their reasoning faculties are made like unto God, & fram'd after his image, and that Reason is the most excellent gift God can bestow, do they not destroy this likeness, deface this image, and give up the dignity of human Nature; when they give up their Reason to any person whatever.

CAN we lay too great a stress on Reason, when we consider, 'tis only by virtue of it God can hold communication with Man? Nor can otherwise, if I may so speak, witness for himself, or assert the Wisdom & Goodness of his conduct, than by submitting his ways to Mens cool deliberation, & strict examination? since 'tis from the marks we discern in the Laws of the Universe, and its Government, that we can demonstrate it to be govern'd by a God of infinite Wisdom

Wisdom & Goodness. He, whose Reason does not enable him to do this, can neither discern the Wisdom, Goodness, or even the Being of a God.

THEY only answer the end for which their Reason was given them, who judge of the Will of God, by the reasonableness & goodness of doctrines; & think his Laws, like his works, carry in them the marks of Divinity; and they likewise do the greatest honour to the Scripture, who suppose it deals with Men as with rational Creatures; and therefore admit not of any of its doctrines without a strict examination; and those, who take a contrary method, wou'd, if they liv'd in Turkey, embrace *Mahometism*, and believe in the *Alcoran*.

AND indeed, a blind submission is so far from doing credit to true Religion, that it puts all Religions on the same foot; for without judging of a Religion by its internal marks, there's nothing but miracles to plead; and miracles true or false, if they are believ'd (& where are they not?) will have the same effect. Nay, if miracles can be perform'd by evil, as well as by good Beings, the worst Religion may have the most miracles, as needing them most. And it was a proverbial saying among the Philosophers of Greece; *Θαυμάσια μωροῖς; Miracles for Fools, and Reasons for wise Men.* The *Bacians* were remarkable for their stupidity, and the number of their Oracles; and if you look no further than the Christian World, you will find, that ignorance, and the belief of daily miracles go hand in hand; and that there's nothing too absurd for the Peoples belief. And if the most learned *Huetius* * gives us a true account of things, there are no miracles recorded in the Bible, but many of the like nature are to be found in Pagan Histories.

Wou'd not Christians themselves, think it a sufficient proof of a Religion's not coming from God, if it

* See his *Alnetanz Quæstiones de Concordia fidei & rationis.*

wanted any of those internal marks, by which the truth of all Religion is to be try'd, without inquiring into its miracles, or any other external proofs? and consequently, wherever these internal marks are found, are not external marks needless? But,

How can we maintain, that the Scripture carries with it all those internal marks of truth, which are inseparable from God's Laws, and at the same time affirm, it requires an implicit faith, & blind obedience to all its dictates? If it does so, how could we have examin'd whether it had those internal marks? Or how can we say, we can't know without the Scripture, what are the internal marks of truth: and at the same time suppose, we must by our Reason know what are those marks, before we can tell whether they are to be found in the Scripture?

If our Nature is a rational Nature, and our Religion a *reasonable service*, there must be such a necessary, and close connexion between them, as to leave no room for any thing that is arbitrary to intervene: And consequently, the Religion of all rational beings must consist, in using such a conduct to God, & their fellow-Creatures, as Reason, whatever circumstances they are in, does direct.

We find St. Paul himself saying, that *Tho' we, (the Apostles) or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed: ** And is not this laying the whole stress on its internal marks? Since there's nothing in the nature of such things as have not those marks, to hinder them from being chang'd every moment.

And as to those who depress Reason, in order to exalt Revelation, I wou'd ask them; what greater proof the Scripture can give us of the rectitude of human understanding in religious matters, than calling it the *Inspiration of the Almighty*; † or than God's so frequently appealing to it, for the justification of his own conduct?

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* Gal. I. 8.

† Job 32. 8.

IN the Prophet *Isaiah*, God representing his own conduct towards his People, under the parable of a vineyard, expressly says, * *O ye Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my Vineyard.* And in *Ezekiel*, God, after a long vindication of his carriage towards his People, appeals to them, saying, † *Hear now, O House of Israel, is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?* And in the Prophet *Micah* he says, ‡ *He will plead with them; asks what he has done; & bids them testify against him.* And in the Prophet *Isaiah*, after the Lord had said, § *Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; Cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widows;* he adds, *Come near, let us reason together, tho' your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.* Does not God here appeal to their Reason for the sufficiency of moral things, to wash away their sins, tho' of the deepest dye? And could God & Man reason together, except there were some notions in common to both; some foundation for such reasoning? Otherwise how could *Job* say, *I desire to reason with God?* ¶ And certainly, the next thing to reasoning with God, is reasoning with one another about God & Religion; that being the chief end, for which our Reason was giv'n us. Thus Paul * *reason'd in the Synagogue every Sabbath.* And again, † *He reason'd with them out of the Scriptures.* And as he reason'd of Righteousness; Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembl'd: ‡ Which, certainly, he had never done, had Paul talk'd about Types, Allegories, Rites, and Ceremonies, &c.

B. You argue, as if we had no certain way of knowing the will of God; except from the light of Nature; and that eternal rule of Reason, by which, you

* *Isa.* 5. 3. † *Ezek.* 18. 25. ‡ *Mic.* 6. 2, 3.

§ *Isa.* 1. 16. 18. ¶ *Job* 13. 3.

* *Acts* 18. 4. † *Chap.* 17. 2. ‡ *Chap.* 24, 25.

you suppose, God governs all his own actions, and expects Men shou'd govern all theirs; but may not God take what method he pleases, to communicate his mind?

A. THUS all traditional Religions with equal confidence assert; and they wou'd have equal right to plead it, if Reason did not afford Men certain *criteria* to know God's will by, which way soever reveal'd.

IF God created Mankind to make them happy here, or hereafter, the Rules he gave them, must be sufficient to answer that benevolent purpose of infinite Wisdom; and consequently, had Mankind observ'd them, there cou'd have been no occasion for an external Revelation; and its great use now is, to make Men observe those neglected Rules, which God, of his infinite wisdom and goodness, design'd for their present, and future happiness.

B. Do not our Divines say, Mankind were for many Ages in a deplorable state, for want of an external Revelation?

A. IF God does every thing that's fit for him to do, cou'd Men be in such a state, because God did not do a thing, which was not fit for him to do? *viz.* make a Revelation, before it was fit for him to make it? Or can the greatest part of Mankind be now in that deplorable condition, for want of a Revelation, which God, out of his infinite Wisdom, has not as yet thought fit to communicate to them; at least with that evidence, as is necessary to make them believe it?

MUST not these Gentlemen suppose, that either God, in creating Mankind, did not design their future happiness, tho' he gave them immortal souls capable of it; or else, that tho' he design'd it, he prescrib'd them such means, or gave them such rules, as either were not sufficient at first, or in process of time became insufficient for that end? but that after Men had been, for many Ages, in this miserable condition, God thought fit to mend the eternal, universal Law
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of Nature, by adding certain observances to it, not founded on the Reason of things; and that those, out of his partial goodness, he communicated only to some, leaving the greatest part in their former dark & deplorable state? But,

Is it not incumbent on those, who make any external Revelation so necessary to the happiness of all Mankind, to shew, how it is consistent with the notion of God's being universally benevolent, not to have reveal'd it to all his Children, when all had equal need of it? Was it not as easy for him to have communicated it to all Nations, as to any one Nation, or Person? Or in all languages, as in any one? Nay, was it not as easy for him to have made all Men, for the sake of this noble end, speak in one, and the same language; as it was at first, to multiply languages, to prevent their building a Tower up to Heaven? Nay, I see not how God can have any need at all of language; to let Mankind know his will; since he has at all times communicated his mind to them without it.

B. THESE, I confess, are considerable difficulties; but as to the last difficulty, did not God give Laws to the *Jews*, of which other Nations knew nothing?

A. NOR were they concern'd to know, or when known, oblig'd to observe them; nor did they bind the *Jews* themselves, but for a time; and even then, they were for the most part impracticable, out of the Land of *Canaan*; where God, as I shall fully shew hereafter, acted, not as Governour of the *Universe*, but as King of the *Jews*, by virtue of the *Horeb Covenant*, which he obtain'd at his own request. But when God acts as Governour of the *Universe*, his Laws are alike design'd for all under his government; that is, all Mankind; and consequently, what equally concerns all, must be equally knowable by all. And if the universality of a Law, be the only certain mark of its coming from the Governour of Mankind, how can

can we be certain, that that which wants this mark, comes from him? And if Religion belongs to us, as we are Men, must we not, as Men, be capable of knowing it? And if all Mankind are Creatures of the same Creator, & Fellow-creatures with one another, must not all their religious duties, as they are Creatures of the same God, and Fellow-Creatures with one another, be the same? And let me add, that

If Men are religious, as they are rational, must they not be capable, when they come to the use of their Reason, of knowing a Religion founded on Reason? Or must they be oblig'd to leave their country, and endlessly rove up & down, in search of such opinions, as have no foundation in Reason? Or, if they are forc'd to stay at home, be ever examining into all the arbitrary precepts, which are to be met with in any of the traditional Religions they can come at? And should they do so, must they not, since Reason cou'd not direct them in things not depending on Reason, perpetually remain in a state of uncertainty?

I might go further, and ask you, Whether it is consistent with that impartiality which is essential to the Deity, not to make those, he designs should know his Will by Revelation, capable of knowing that Revelation, and consequently, his Will contain'd it, at one time as well as another? Which cou'd not be, if that which was plain at first, became obscure by reason of the change of languages, customs, the distance of time & place, the errors of Transcribers & Translators, & a hundred other things too long to mention. Can these difficulties be avoided, without supposing, that Religion, which way soever reveal'd, carries such internal marks of truth, as, at all times & places, plainly shews itself, even to the meanest capacity, to be the Will of a Being of universal & impartial benevolence.

E. THE greater stress you lay on Reason, the more you extol Revelation; which being design'd to exalt

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and perfect our rational nature, must be itself highly reasonable.

A. I grant you this is the design of Religion; but have not the Ecclesiasticks in most places entirely defeated this design; and so far debas'd human-nature, as to render it unsociable, fierce & cruel? Have they not made external Revelation the pretence of filling the Christian World with animosity, hatred, persecution, ruin & destruction; in order to get an absolute dominion over the consciences, properties & persons of the Laity? But passing this over, If the perfection of any Nature, whether human, angelical, or divine, consists in being govern'd by the Law of its Nature; & ours, in acting that part, for which we were created; by observing all those duties, which are founded on the relation we stand in to God & one another; can Revelation any otherwise help to perfect human-nature, but as it induces Men to live up to this Law of their Nature? And if this Law is the test of the perfection of any written Law, must not that be the most perfect Law, by which the perfection of all others is to be try'd? And,

If nothing but reasoning can improve Reason, & no Book can improve my Reason in any point; but as it gives me convincing proofs of its reasonableness; a Revelation, that will not suffer us to judge of its dictates by our Reason, is so far from improving Reason, that it forbids the use of it; and reasoning faculties unexercis'd, will have as little force, as unexercis'd limbs: He that is always carry'd, will at length become unable to go: And if the *Holy Ghost*, as Bishop Taylor says, * *works by enlightening, & improving our natural faculties*, it can only be by using such means as will improve them, in proposing reasons & arguments to convince our understanding; which can only be improv'd, by studying the nature and reason

* *Liberty of Prophecy*, sup. 18. pag. 19.

reason of things: *I apply'd my heart* (says the wisest of Men) *to know, and to search, & to seek out wisdom & the Reason of Things.* *

So that the Holy Ghost can't deal with Men as rational Creatures, but by proposing arguments to convince their understandings, & influence their wills, in the same manner as if propos'd by other agents; for to go beyond this, would be making impressions on Men, as a seal does on wax; to the confounding of their Reason, & their liberty in choosing; and the Man would then be merely passive, and the action would be the action of another being acting upon him, for which he could be no way accountable: But if the Holy Ghost does not act thus, & Revelation itself be not arbitrary, must it not be founded on the Reason of Things? And consequently, be a *Republication, or Restoration of the Religion of Nature?* And since that takes in every thing thus founded, all the help any authority whatever can afford a reasonable Being, is the offering him arguments, of which his own Reason must judge; and when he perceives their agreement with his self-evident notions, 'tis *then*, & only *then*, he can be sure of their truth. And tho' Men cou'd not mistake, as we see they daily do, a natural for a supernatural suggestion, yet whether that suggestion comes from a good or evil Being, (continually tempting people) can only be judg'd by the nature of the things suggested. For 'tis in vain to have recourse to miracles, if evil as well as good Beings have the power of doing them? And some are so heterodox, as to imagine, one reason why evil Beings are permitted to do miracles, is, least from the report of miracles, (which is alike spread every where, & for every Religion) Men might be tempted not to rely on the Reason & Nature of Things, and so run into endless superstitions. And,

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* Eccles. 7. 25.

GOD, in the Old Testament, * is said to suffer miracles to be done by false Prophets, in order to prove his People; and in the New, such miracles, as would, *if it were possible, deceive the very Elect.* †

IN short, Revelation either bids, or forbids Men to use their Reason, in judging of all religious matters; if the former, then it only declares that to be our duty, which was so independent of and, antecedent to Revelation; if the latter, then it does not deal with Men as with rational Creatures, but deprives them of that inestimable blessing.

B. WHO, I pray, maintains, that Revelation forbids us the use of our Reason, in judging of the truth of any religious matters?

A. IS not every one of this opinion, that says, we are not to read the Scripture with freedom of assenting, or dissenting, just as we judge it agrees, or disagrees with the Light of Nature, & the Reason of Things? And this, one would think, none could deny was absolutely necessary, in reading a book, where 'tis own'd that the *Letter killeth*. Nay, do not all in effect own as much, who will not allow the Scripture any meaning, how plain soever, but what is agreeable to their Reason? which shews, that in their opinion, Reason was rather given to supply the defects of Revelation, than Revelation the defects of Reason. Is there a Divine, who, tho' he pretends ever so high a veneration for the Scripture, but will own there are many places, where 'tis necessary to recede from the letter, and find out a sense agreeable to his Reason; which supposes it is that, & not the authority of the Book (for that's the same in both cases) which makes him approve the literal sense in one case, & condemn it in another. And were Men not govern'd by their Reason, but by some external Revelation, they had nothing more to do, but to take the words of that Revelation, in its literal, obvious, & plain meaning,

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* Deut. 13. 1. 3.

† Mat. 24. 24.

how absurd soever it might appear to their carnal Reason.

B. WE may take the words of fallible Men in the plain, literal sense; but if any thing is said by infallible Men, which in the obvious meaning of the words is inconsistent with Reason, we must have recourse to an allegorical sense; or if that will not do, we must put no meaning at all on the words; thus we support the dignity of both Revelation & Reason.

A. Is not this owning you take not your Religion from those infallible Men, but you endeavour to impose that Religion your Reason tells you is true, upon their words, by allowing them no other meaning, how plain soever, but what you antecedently know by the Light of Nature to be the Will of God.

THERE's no Book, but you may own its infallibility, and yet be entirely govern'd by your Reason, if you, as often as you find any thing not agreeable to your Reason, torture it, to make it speak what is so. Would you think a *Mahometan* was govern'd by his *Alchoran*, who, upon all occasions should thus depart from the literal sense; nay, would you not tell him, that his inspir'd Book fell infinitely short of *Cicero's* uninspir'd writings, where there is no such occasion to recede from the letter?

THE *Meammarites*, a famous Sect among the *Mahometans*, and the *Myssicks*, very numerous in *Turky*, sensible of the difficulties & uncertainties that attend all traditional Facts, maintain, * „ That God can „ never discover himself with certainty any other way, „ than by speaking to the Reason and Understanding „ of Men: For if we depend, say they, on oral Tradition, we lay ourselves open to the greatest falsities & impositions; there being nothing so liable to „ infinite changes & alterations, numberless mistakes, „ additions & subtractions; according as Mens opinions

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* *Mahom.* Life in Eng. before *Reland's Mahom.*

pag. 39, 40.

„ nious vary by the change of times & circumstances.
 „ Nor are Books more exempt from such doubt-
 „ fulness & uncertainty; since we find so much dis-
 „ agreement among Books wrote by different Men,
 „ in different parts & different ages; & even among
 „ the different Books of the same Men. But suppose,
 „ continue they, we should resolve all our Faith into
 „ the sole text of the *Alchoran*, the difficulty & un-
 „ certainty will still remain; if we consider, how
 „ many *Metaphors*, *Allegories*, and other *Figures* of
 „ speech; how many obscure, ambiguous, intricate
 „ and mysterious *passages* are to be met with in this
 „ infallible Book; & how different are the opinions,
 „ expositions and interpretations of the most subtle
 „ Doctors, and learned Commentators on every one
 „ of them. The only sure way, then, add they, to
 „ come to the certain knowledge of the truth, is to
 „ consult God himself, wait his inspirations, live just
 „ & honest lives, be kind and beneficent to all our
 „ Fellow-creatures, & pity such as differ from us in
 „ their opinions about the authority, integrity, and
 „ meaning of the *Alchoran*.

THE *Mahometans*, tho' they own the Law of Christ;
 yet they make it of no use, because they suppose,
 the Law of *Mahomet* is more perfect, and 'tis that
 they must stick to: And do not some Men, by arguing
 much after the same manner in relation to the Gospel,
 render the Law of Nature useless? But if we are still
 moral agents, and as such are capable of judging be-
 tween Religion & Superstition, can we think other-
 wise of the Gospel, than that it is design'd, not to
 free us from the eternal Law of Nature, but from
 those absurdities, which the folly or knavery of Men
 have introduc'd in opposition to it? Hence it is, that
 the Scripture speaks in general terms, without de-
 fining those things which it commands, or forbids;
 because it supposes Men moral agents, capable by their
 Reason to discern Good from Evil, Virtue from Vice,
 Religion from Superstition.

IF Mr. Lock reasons justly, * „ No Mission can be look'd on to be divine, that delivers any thing derogating from the honour of the once, only, true, invisible God, or inconsistent with Natural Religion & the Rules of Morality: Because God having discover'd to Men the unity and majesty of his eternal Godhead, & the truths of Natural Religion & Morality by the light of Reason, he cannot be suppos'd to back the contrary by Revelation; for that would be to destroy the evidence and use of Reason, without which, Men cannot be able to distinguish divine Revelation from diabolical Imposture.

Does not this suppose, *First*, that no Mission can be divine, or its Revelation true, that admits of more than one, only, true, invisible God? *Secondly*, That Men, by their Reason, must know, wherein the honour of this one, only, true, invisible God consists; otherwise, they might (for ought they know) be oblig'd by Revelation to admit what is derogatory to his honour? *Thirdly*, They must know by the light of Reason, what are the truths of Natural Religion & rules of Morality; because otherwise they might be oblig'd to admit things inconsistent with them: And that to suppose the contrary, wou'd be to destroy the use & evidence of Reason, without which, Men would not be able to distinguish divine Revelation from diabolical Imposture; which implies, that in things tending to the honour of God, and the good of Mankind, the *dernier* resort is to Reason; whose dictates, as they need no miracles for their support, so all doctrines inconsistent with them, tho' they plead endless miracles, must be look'd upon as diabolical Impostures. And

When the Apostle says, † *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are*

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lovely.

‡ *Positivum's Works*, pag. 226. † *Phil.* 4. 8.

Justly, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things: is not this referring us to the Light of Nature, to know what these things are, which shew themselves to be the will of God by their natural excellency?

B. OUR Divines, tho' they own Reason may do tolerably well in things between Man & Man, yet in matters relating to God, Reason, they say, must submit to Faith; and that the chief end of Revelation is to give Men, especially the common People, just conceptions, & right notions of the nature & perfections of God; which they cou'd never have from the dim Light of Nature, without the help of Revelation.

A. THO' they argue thus, yet at the same time they find themselves oblig'd to own, that the Scripture, when taken literally, gives the vulgar false and unworthy notions of the divine Nature, by imputing almost every where to God, not only human parts, but human weakness & imperfections, and even the worst of human passions. To this, indeed, they have two answers, which seem inconsistent: First, That 'tis necessary to accommodate things in some measure to the gross conceptions of the Vulgar. The other is, that Reason has given all Men such just conceptions of the divine Nature, that there's no danger that even the common People shou'd take these expressions literally.

B. TWO Reason, on which you lay such stress, may demonstrate, that there are not more Gods than one, yet Reason can never tell us, that there's more than one that is God: tho' Reason tells us, that there are not three Gods, yet Reason cou'd never tell us, that, tho' in the idea of a divine person the idea of God be included, each Person being by himself God, yet that the multiplying of divine Persons, was not the multiplying of Gods: And tho' Reason declares, there's a difference between three & one, yet Reason will never discover, that there's no more in three Persons,

Persons, than in one, all three together being the same numerical God, as each is by himself. Reason will never be able to find out a middle between a numerical, and a specific unity, between one in number, and one in kind; and yet without it, how can we suppose the same God to be self-existent, & not self-existent, *or* Reason can as little discover a *medium* between a nominal, and a real difference; and yet without it how can we avoid *Sabellianism* on the one hand, or *Polytheism* on the other? There's nothing Reason can tell us more plainly, than that God & a Man are two, distinct, intelligent persons; but can Reason tell us they may become one intelligent person, even while their personal natures and properties remain infinitely distinct and different? Thus you see, how Reason must submit to Faith.

A. I, for my part, not understanding these orthodox paradoxes, can only at present say, I do not disbelieve them, but must add, that as I am a rational Creature, & God requires of me a *reasonable service*, I ought not, nay, I cannot have any faith, which will not bear the test of Reason; and therefore, notwithstanding your maxim of Reason's submitting to Faith, I will venture to affirm, if a Book assert (supposing the words of it are taken in their plain, literal sense) immoral, or impious doctrines, and there are not in that Book certain marks to tell us, where they are to be taken literally, & where figuratively, or, what is the figurative sense, that Men in these points are as much to be determin'd by their Reason, as if there was no such book.

B. This, sure, can't be the case with relation to the Scriptures.

A. I shall only tell you what the most celebrated Fathers say on this head. *Athanasius* says, *; Should we understand a great part of the sacred Writ literally, we should fall into most enormous blasphemies.

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mies.

* *Questions ad Antiochenos*. To. 2. pag. 357. D.

mies. St. Cyril says,* much the same. St. Gregory the first says, † „ The Scripture is not only dead, „ but deadly; for it is written, *The letter kills, but the „ spirit quickeneth*; and this is what the whole divine „ letter does. „ And in another place ‡ he compares them to beasts who regard the letter. And St. Jerom says, § „ If we adhere to the flesh of the letter, it „ will be the occasion of many evils. „ And Gregory Nyssen ¶ makes the like reflection.

B. I durst not have made so bold with the Scriptures, as these Fathers; but content myself with saying with the excellent Bishop of Litchfield, ✕ that „ God, was he to speak with Men, must not only „ speak their very language, but according to the „ conceptions of those, he speaks to: To rectify their „ sentiments in *natural*, *historical*, or *chronological* „ matters, to mend their *Logick*, or *Rhetorick* when „ 'tis defective, but has no ill influence on piety, is „ not the business of Revelation. -- Needlesly to „ contradict innocent vulgar notions, is the sure way „ to lose the peoples affections, and to forego a „ prudential way of gaining them.

A. WITH submission to this learned Author, is there no difference between God's not rectifying Mens sentiments in those matters, and using himself such sentiments as need to be rectify'd? or between God's not mending Mens *Logick*, or *Rhetorick*, where 'tis defective, & using such himself? or between God's not contradicting vulgar notions, and confirming them, by speaking according to them? Or can the God of Truth, stand in need of Error to support his Truth, his eternal Truth? Or can infinite Wisdom despair of gaining, or keeping Peoples affections, without having

* Lib. 9. contr. Julian, p. 303, 304. to. 6. Oper. 18-

† Comm. on 2 Kings c. 7. ‡ Prolog. in Cant. Cantic. fol. 256. col. 1. B. § In Gal. c. 5. p. 34. B.

¶ De vita Moysis, To. 1. p. 235. D. & A.

✕ Defence of Christian. p. 363.

recourse to such mean arts? No wonder, if Men use pious frauds, when they think God himself has recourse to them. In this case, must not Men by their Reason judge, when God makes use of defective Logick, or Rhetorick, and speaks in Natural, Historical, & Chronological matters, not according to the truth of things, but according to the conceptions of those of the vulgar, to whom he directs his speech? Nor can I think of any falsehood, suppos'd to be authoris'd by the God of truth, but may be made use of to some ill purpose: in Divinity as well as Mathematicks it's a certain Maxim, *uno absurdo dato mille sequuntur*.

St. Austin argues after another manner, in saying, * „Should Unbelievers know us to be mistaken in such „things as concern the natural world, & alledge our „Books for such vain opinions, how shall they believe the same Books, when they speak of the resurrection of the dead, & the world to come?

Dr. Prideaux, speaking of the marks of imposture, says, † „If there be but one known truth in the whole „scheme of Nature with which it interferes, this must „make the discovery; & there's no Man, that forgets „an imposture, but makes himself liable to be this „way convicted of it. The Doctor, sure, wou'd not have asserted this so roundly, had he not compar'd the philosophical, & scriptural scheme of Nature, and perceiv'd their exact agreement. But,

Not only Dr. Burnet in defence of his *Archeologia*, but all, who maintain, that the Sun is immovable, & that 'tis the Earth which moves, sufficiently shew, that the scriptural & philosophical account of natural things seldom agree: However, to give one instance, there's scarce a Country-man so ignorant, as not to know, that if the seed thrown into the earth is kill'd by drought, or dies by any other accident, it never rises;

* Gen. ad Lit. l. 1. c. 19.

† Letter to the Deists. p. 139. Edit. 7. 8vo.

rises; but St. Paul (without regard to that judgment, which our Saviour denounces against a Man who calls his Brother Fool;) says, * *Thou Fool, that which thou sowest is not quickned, except it die: And our Saviour himself says, † Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, & die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.* And the Greek Church, at this day, make use of beil'd corn at their commemoration of the dead, to signify the *Resurrection of the body.* ‡

To convince you how entirely we are to depend on Reason in matters of Religion, I will only ask you, Why you suppose it so absurd in the *Papists* to say, that Men bred up in their Church, are oblig'd intirely to depend on its infallibility; & that they, who have not had the happiness to be thus educated, ought, indeed, to use their Reason to bring them into their Church; but that then they are no longer to be govern'd by it, but with the rest of the members, equally to rely on the Church's infallible decisions.

B. BECAUSE this suppos'd Infallibility puts it in the power of that Church, to make their Votaries believe Virtue to be Vice, and Vice, Virtue, or any other absurdity whatever; since they have no way to know, whether it does not require such things, but by examining, by their Reason, all her doctrines; & if Reason be sufficient to discover the Being and Will of God, and that their Church holds no doctrines disagreeable to his Will, (for this they must own Reason capable of discovering, before it could bring Men into their Church) they, in spite of their pretences to infallibility, put the whole stress on Reason. And if afterwards, they teach Men to renounce that Reason, by which before they would have them wholly govern'd, it can be for no other cause, but to prevent their discovering in that Church such errors, as they could

* 1 Cor. 15. 36. † John 12. 24.

‡ The Works of Gregory of Christ Church, p. 141.

wou'd not well know before; and which, if known, wou'd have hinder'd them from coming into it.

A. THE *Papists*, you know, reply, that if this reasoning is good, it strikes at all implicit faith in *St. Peter*, as well as his successors, & equally concludes against Mens giving up their Reason to any persons in former ages, as well as the present; since 'tis by that alone they are able to judge, whether their doctrines are consistent with the light of Nature, & free from superstition, and contain nothing in them unworthy of a divine original: Before examining what Men teach, there's no reason to have an implicit faith in one set of Men more than another; and examination destroys all implicit faith, & all authority whatever; since if they then embrace the opinions of others, whether Apostles or not, 'tis because they appear agreeable to their Reason. If you say, the Apostles wou'd by Reason bring Men into their Religion, & after that, have them wholly govern'd by their authority, may not the *Papists* retort on you your own answer? and cry, „ That if Reason is sufficient to discover the Being & Will of God, & that the Apostles taught no doctrines, but what are agreeable to his Will; (for this, say they, you must allow Reason capable of discovering, otherwise it cou'd never lead Men to believe what the Apostles taught;) You alike put the wole stress on Reason: And you must own, either that Men are intirely to be govern'd by Reason, & then you destroy all authority whatever; or else not to be govern'd by it. & then you can't, by Reason, shew the absurdity of that implicit faith, the Catholick Church requires.

B. You know, that in answer to all objections of this nature, we say as Bishop *Burnet* does, in his exposition of the *Articles* of our Church, * „ That if we observe the style & method of the Scriptures, we shall find in them all over a constant appeal to

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* *Expof. of the 19th Article, pag. 183.*

„ Mens Reason, and to their intellectual faculties.
 „ If the meer dictates of the Church, or of *infallible*
 „ *Men*, had been the resolution & foundation of Faith,
 „ there had been no need of such a long thread of
 „ reasoning and discourse, as both our Saviour us'd
 „ when on Earth, & the Apostles us'd in their Wri-
 „ tings. We see the way of authority is not taken,
 „ but explanations are offer'd, proofs, & illustrations
 „ are brought, to convince the mind; which shews
 „ that God, in the clearest manifestation of his will,
 „ would deal with us as with rational Creatures,
 „ who are not to believe, but on persuasion; and to
 „ use our Reason, in order to the attaining that per-
 „ suasion.

A. THIS is all I contend for; & had not what the
 Bishop says, (tho' it amounts to giving up all im-
 plicit faith) been agreeable to the whole tenor of the
 Scriptures, and the doctrines of our Church, some of
 those, who have so nicely examin'd into all parts of
 his *Exposition* of the Articles, would never have let
 this passage escape without remarks. And, therefore,
 since 'tis in defence of the *Protestant Religion*, & the
 whole current of Scripture, I shall add, to what this
 excellent Father of the Church has said; that when
 any person has recourse to arguments and reasonings,
 he does, in those instances, disclaim all authority, and
 appeals to the Reason of those he means to persuade,
 & in order to it, would have them judge of the force
 of his arguments, by those common, & self-evident
 notions, upon which the validity of all proofs depend;
 and Men, in examining what he says by that Reason
 to which he appeals, wholly answer the end for which
 he argues with them, tho', upon examination, they
 are not convinc'd by his reasons. To require more,
 would be to require impossibilities; since 'tis not in
 Mens power, after they have consider'd things as well
 as they are able, to believe otherwise than they do.
 And had the Apostles said to those they design'd to

convert: „ It will be an affront to our infallibility, not to have an implicit faith in us, not to take on content whatever we say; You are, therefore, no longer to act as moral agents, or to have recourse to the essential difference of Good & Evil; to the Light & Law of Nature, or to the eternal Reason of things, to judge of the truth of what we declare. No, this is the Faith, and thus you must believe, or perish everlastingly. „ Had the Apostles, I say, ask'd after this manner, do you think they could have gain'd one reasonable Convert? No, they knew full well, that this was not the way to deal with rational Creatures; they, on the contrary, as I shall fully shew hereafter, every where speak to this effect, „ * We desire you would, with the utmost freedom, „ examine our doctrines: since if they are, as we „ affirm, true, they will not only bear the test of Reason, „ but the more they are try'd, the brighter they will „ appear: † This will be *enabling* yourselves, & doing „ justice to your own understanding, as well as to „ our doctrines. „ If Men have any authority, 'tis then only, when they renounce all peremptory authority; & instead of claiming *dominion over Mens Faith*, desire they would prove every thing by those tests God had given them, in order to discern Good from Evil, Truth from Falsehood, Religion from Superstition; thus the Apostle seeks to maintain his credit & Authority with the *Thessalonians*; *Prove all things*, says he, *hold fast that which is good*.

E. Do not you, by laying such a stress on Reason, in effect, set aside Revelation?

A. No, if Revelation be a reasonable Revelation, the greater stress we lay upon Reason, the more we establish Revelation.

E. But not on the foot of its own authority, but only as you judge it agreeable to Reason; and therefore I question, whether any of our eminent Divines

* 1 *Thes.* 5. 21. † *1st* *Cor.* 17. 11.

vines talk thus in commendation of Reason, to the disparagement of Authority.

A. If Reason is all we rational Creatures have to trust to, being that alone which distinguishes us from Brutes, incapable of Religion, Divines, even those of the most narrow principles, however they may shuffie a while, must make Reason their *dernier* resort; but however, since Reason alone will not satisfy you, but you must have authority even against authority, I shall mention what some of our most eminent Divines say, when they are defending Revelation against the attacks of *Infidels*; or writing against the *Papists*, or Men *popishly* affected.

Dr. J. Clarke, Dean of *Sarum*, in defending Christianity against the attacks of *Infidels*, who charge it with requiring an implicit faith, thinks this such a scandal to Christianity, that a good part of his *Boylean Lectures* are to clear it from that charge; „ We find, *says he*, * „ no Command in Scripture to lay aside „ our Reason or Understanding, but directly the contrary is there affirmed of the Christian Religion, *viz.* „ that it is our *reasonable* service: † And therefore „ the method in which Christ and his Apostles taught „ *this service*, was agreeable to Reason, *viz.* by exhorting Men to *attend seriously*, to *weigh diligently*, ‡ „ their doctrines and precepts, &c. and then asks „ § Are these, & such like expressions calculated to „ enslave Mens understandings, & to induce a blind „ and implicit obedience? Such methods may serve „ the purpose of Superstition, but true Religion can „ gain nothing by them.

Dr. *Whitchoc* does this justice to external Revelation, as to say, § „ The Scripture's way of dealing „ with Men in matters of Religion, is always by evidence of Reason & argument; & very judiciously adds, „ I reckon, that which has not Reason in it, or for it, is

* *Orig. of Moral Evil*, p. 83. † *Rom.* 12. 1. ‡ *Mat.* 11. 15.
§ *Orig. of Moral Evil*, p. 89. § *Vol. of Serms.* p. 117.

is Man's Superstition, and not Religion of God's making :,, What an infinity of disputes would this rule have cut off? What I pray, was the grand occasion of so many monstrous *Heresies*, even in the primitive times, but their believing the Scripture's way of dealing with Men, was not by evidence of Reason. And if any now think otherwise, are they not in danger of making no better distinction between Religion & Superstition, than a modern Philosopher, who thus concisely distinguishes them; * *Tales publickly allow'd, Religion; not allow'd; Superstition.*

Dr. Eadly, the strenuous assertor of our religious, as well as civil Rights, says, † ,, Authority is the greatest & most irreconcilable enemy to *Truth* & *Argument*, that *this world* ever furnish'd-out. All the *seducery*, all the *colour of plausibility*, all the *artifice* & *cunning* of the subtlest disputers in the world, may be laid open, and turn'd to the advantage of that very truth, which they design'd to hide, or to deprecate; But against *Authority* there is no defence. And after having shewn, that it was *Authority* that crush'd the noble sentiments of *Socrates* and others; & that it was by *Authority*, that the *Jews* & *Heathens* combated the truth of the Gospel; he says, ,, When *Christians* were increas'd to a *majority*, & came to think the same method to be the only proper one, for the advantage of *their cause*, which had been the enemy and destroyer of it; then, it was the *Authority* of *Christians*, which, by degrees, not only laid waste the honour of *Christianity*, but well nigh extinguish'd it among Men. -- It was *Authority*, which would have prevented all *Reformation*, where it is; & which has put a *barrier* against it, wherever it is not. -- How indeed, can it be expected, that the *same thing*, which has in all ages, and in all countries, been hurtful to *truth*, and *true Religion*,

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* Hobbes. † Answer to the Represent. of the Comitt. of the lower-House of Commons. p. 312, 313, 314, 315.

„ amongst Men, shou'd in *any* age, or *any* country,
 „ become a friend & guardian of them. „ And to
 obviate an objection easily foreseen, he says, „ It was
 „ *Authority*, which hinder'd the voice of the *Son* of
 „ *God* himself from being heard; and which alone
 „ stood in opposition to *his* powerful arguments, and
 „ his divine doctrine. „ Which supposes there's no
 Christian doctrine, but what has powerful arguments
 to support it; or in other words, has divinity stamp'd
 on it, shewing itself by its innate excellency to be the
 will of God; since to put its credit on meer Authority,
 is to put its credit on that, which has been, and
 always will be, an enemy to truth. Nay, he supposes,
 that were it possible, that Authority & Truth cou'd
 consist together, & the latter be receiv'd for the sake
 of the former, it cou'd not avail. His words are,
 „ Where *Truth* happens to be receiv'd for the sake
 „ of Authority, there is just so much diminish'd from
 „ the love of Truth, & the glory of Reason, & the
 „ acceptableness of Men to God, as there is attri-
 „ buted to *Authority*. „ And,

ARCHBISHOP Tillotson says, * „ All our reasonings
 „ about divine Revelation are necessarily gather'd by
 „ our natural notions about Religion; & therefore,
 „ he, who sincerely desires to do the Will of God,
 „ is not apt to be impos'd on by vain, and confident
 „ pretences of divine Revelation, but if any Doctrine
 „ be propos'd to him, which is pretended to come
 „ from God, he measures it by those sure, & steady
 „ notions, which he has of the divine Nature and
 „ Perfections, and by these he will easily discern,
 „ whether it be worthy of God or not, & likely to
 „ proceed from him: He will consider the nature &
 „ tendency of it, or whether it be a Doctrine ac-
 „ cording to godliness, such as is agreeable to the
 „ divine Nature & Perfections, and tends to make us
 „ like unto God: if it be not, tho' an Angel should
 bring

* *Serm. Vol. 3. pag. 40.*

bring it, he would not receive it. „ And if no miracles, no, not the preaching of an Angel, ought to make us receive any Doctrine that does not carry those internal marks; no miracles, certainly, ought to make us reject any Doctrine that has these internal marks. And much to the same purpose, our judicious Doctor *Claret* says, * „ When Men pretend to work „ Miracles, and talk of immediate Revelations, of „ knowing the truth by inspiration, & of more than „ ordinary illumination, we ought not to be frighted „ with those big words, from looking what is und r „ them, nor to be afraid of calling these things in o „ question, which are set off with *high-flown* pretences. „ From hence it has come to pass, that Superstition „ and Idolatry, Enthusiasms and Impositions have so „ much prevail'd in the world. It is somewhat strange, „ that we should believe Men the more, for that very „ reason upon which we should believe them the „ less. „

I shall give you the Sentiments of one judicious Divine more, since they contain a summary of what I have been saying; his words are, † „ It could not „ be avoidable, but that this natural reverence for „ divine Revelations, & proneness of believing them, „ would produce some ill effects, prejudicial to the „ Reason and interest of Mankind, a fatal credulity „ would creep into the world, & possess the minds „ of the more ignorant persons, and induce them „ blindly to believe every bold pretender to Revela- „ tion. After a laborious & fruitless search of future „ happiness, Men were apt to embrace any System „ of Religion presented to them; if it flatter'd their „ hopes of future felicity, they were loth to discover „ the error and illusion of any pleasing revelation; „ they wish'd it might be true, & what at last, they „ wish'd,

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* *Claret's* Persuasive to an ingen. Trial of Opin. p. 19.

† Enthusiasm of the Ch. of *Rome*. p. 234. suppos'd to „ be *Stillingfleet's*.

„ wish'd, they at last believ'd to be true. — Many
 „ fear'd they should be injurious to the divine Majesty,
 „ & incur the guilt of *Atheism*; if they should scrupulously
 „ examine what pretended to carry the stamp
 „ of his authority, & to have been reveal'd by him.
 „ To entertain scruples in this case, was thought no
 „ less than sacrilege, & every doubt was esteem'd an
 „ affront to God: to which may be added, that they
 „ should contract no small merit, & ever lay an obligation
 „ on God, if they immediately resign'd up
 „ their judgment to his suppos'd Revelation, & blindly
 „ receiv'd it without any doubt or hesitation.

„ THIS in all Ages, open'd a wide gap, & prepar'd
 „ a way for error & Superstition; while the whimsies
 „ of every foolish *Enthusiast*, & the follies of every
 „ bold *Impostor* were propos'd under the venerable
 „ name of *divine Oracles*. — Hence all the absurdities
 „ of the *Pagan* Religion found belief, and entertainment
 „ in the world, and the most extravagant *im-*
 „ postors never wanted *Profelytes*. Hence the most
 „ pernicious errors of *Hereticks*, found admission into
 „ the Church, and the pretence of new Revelations,
 „ seduc'd some part of the *Christian* world.

„ To this fatal credulity, and danger of illusion
 „ arising from it, God & Nature have prescrib'd an
 „ excellent remedy; the use of our Reason, which
 „ may examine the grounds and testimonies of all
 „ pretended Revelations, enquire into their truth,
 „ and after a scrupulous trial, pass sentence on them.
 „ This, the interest of Truth, & the honour of our
 „ Nature requires us to perform, that we may neither
 „ prostitute the former, nor depreciate the latter. —
 „ Without this precedent enquiry, our belief would
 „ become unlawful; for to obviate the rules of conduct,
 „ prescrib'd to our understanding, were to overthrow
 „ all the Laws of Nature, to debase the dignity
 „ of Mankind, and to efface the image of God im-
 „ planted in us. These Rules assure us, that God
 „ can't

„ can't command any thing foolish or ridiculous. --
 „ No greater injury can be offer'd to the Deity;
 „ than to believe him the author of any Religion;
 „ which prescribes, or encourages foolish, or super-
 „ stitious practice. -- Justly does *Plutarch* wonder,
 „ why *Atheism* should rather be accus'd of impiety,
 „ than Superstition, since few are mov'd by any de-
 „ fect in the order of government, to call in question
 „ the Existence of God, but the tricks & cheats of
 „ superstitious persons, their *Enthusiastick* motions,
 „ ridiculous actions, exorcisms, & lustrations, & such
 „ like, give them occasion to believe it better there
 „ should be no God, than such a God, as the Author
 „ of such a superstitious Religion must necessarily be.

If this Author reasons justly, as all *Protestants* will
 allow, at least when they write against the *enthusiasm*
 of the Church of *Rome*, does it not follow, that 'tis
 our duty, before we embrace any instituted Religion;
 to examine by that Light which God has given us,
 into every part of it; & after a scrupulous trial, pass
 sentence on it? If the interest of Truth, & the honour
 of Man's Nature require them to perform this grand
 duty, must not their Reason, antecedently to all ex-
 ternal Revelation, afford certain tests to distinguish
 between truth and falsehood in all religious matters?
 'Twould be ridiculous to tell Men, that 'tis a crime
 worse than *Atheism*, to admit a Religion, which pre-
 scribes, or encourages foolish or superstitious practices,
 unless upon a supposition, that their Reason can tell
 them what are such practices, & thereby hinder them
 from embracing a Religion, which requires things of
 this nature. And if Men are apt to embrace any
 Religion (the *Mahometan* for instance) which flatters
 their hopes of future felicity, & makes them loth to
 discover the pleasing illusion, does it not follow, that
 the more any Religion does so, the more cause Men
 have critically to examine into its reasonableness?
 Because without such a precedent enquiry, their belief

would be irrational & unlawful, debasing the dignity of Mankind, & effacing the Image of God implanted in them. And,

If the absurdities, not only of the *Pagan* Religion, but even the most pernicious errors among *Christians*, have been occasion'd thro' want of previous examination, nothing can be requisite to discover true Christianity, and to preserve it in its native purity, free from all Superstition, but, after a strict scrutiny, to admit nothing to belong to it, except what our Reason tells us is worthy of having God for its Author. And if it be evident, that we can't discern whether any instituted Religion contains every thing worthy, and nothing unworthy of a divine original, except we can antecedently by our Reason discern what is, or is not worthy of having God for its Author, it necessarily follows, that natural & reveal'd Religion can't differ; Because whatever Reason shews to be worthy of having God for its Author, must belong to Natural Religion; and whatever Reason tells us is unworthy of having God for its Author, can never belong to the true Reveal'd Religion. 'Tis upon this very plan, that I have endeavour'd to shew you wherein true & genuine Christianity consists.

B. By the reasoning of these Divines, Religion is the plainest thing in the world: We, it seems, have nothing to do, but to examine what notions are worthy of God, in order to know his will: but do they tell us, how we may certainly know what those notions are?

A. ALL Divines of what denomination soever agree, at least in words, that God can't act arbitrarily in the government of the world, or command things for commanding-sake; but that all his Laws, being calculated for the good of Mankind, carry with them the marks of consummate Wisdom and Goodness. However, I shall mention two.

THE incomparable Archbishop Tillotson says, *
 „ It wou'd be little less than an horrid and dreadful
 „ blasphemy, to say, that God, out of his sovereign
 „ will & pleasure, can do any thing which contra-
 „ dicts the nature of God, or the essential perfections
 „ of the Deity; or to imagine that the pleasure and
 „ will of the holy, just, & good God, is not always
 „ regulated, and determin'd by the essential and in-
 „ dispensable Laws of Goodness, Holiness and Righ-
 „ teousness.

THE judicious Dr. Sæe affirms, † „ That to sup-
 „ pose the will and power of God is not perfectly
 „ subject to his moral perfections, is to suppose him
 „ a very defective & imperfect Being; a lawless will
 „ & power being the greatest defect in Nature; where-
 „ fore to secure our minds against all injurious appre-
 „ hensions of God, this is a most necessary rule, that
 „ we conceive him to be such a Being as can never
 „ will, nor act any thing, but what his own essential
 „ Wisdom, Goodness and Justice do approve. --
 „ To affirm, he is not oblig'd to regulate himself by
 „ Wisdom, Justice & Goodness, or that he can do
 „ otherwise, is to attribute to him a power to will,
 „ or act foolishly, &c.

B. I shou'd readily approve what the Authors you
 quote have said, to shew the reasonableness of the
 divine Law in every instance, were there not in
 Religion, propositions to be believ'd, which are above
 Reason.

A. If I do not understand the terms of a proposi-
 tion, or if they are inconsistent with one another,
 or so uncertain, that I know not what meaning to
 fix on them, here is nothing told me, & consequently
 no room for belief: But in all cases, where I am ca-
 pable of understanding a proposition, 'tis Reason must
 inform me, whether 'tis certain, probable, or un-
 certain; & even in propositions relating to such facts

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* Vol. 6. p. 216. † *Christ. Life, Part. I. Vol. I. p. 362.*

as we learn from report, 'tis by our Reason alone; in comparing circumstances, &c. that we must judge of their probability. But,

ALTHO' designing Men very well know, that it's impossible to believe, when we know not what it is we are to believe; or to believe an absurd, or contradictory proposition; yet they, because without examination, people may be brought to fancy they believe such things, and it being their interest to confound Mens understandings, and prevent all inquiry, craftily invented the notion of believing things above Reason: Here the ravings of an *Enthusiast* are on a level with the dictates of infinite Wisdom, & nonsense is render'd most sacred; here a contradiction is of great use to maintain a doctrine, that, when fairly stated, is not defensible; because by talking backward & forward, by using obscure terms, & taking words in different senses, they may easily amuse, & puzzle the People. On this foundation *Transubstantiation* is built, & most of those mysterious propositions, about which in former days Christians so frequently murder'd each other. But,

If the Scripture was design'd to be understood, it must be within the reach of human understanding; and consequently, it can't contain propositions that are either above, or below human understanding; and if there are no propositions in the Bible, but what have certain ideas, by common usage annex'd to the words, how can we suppose some are design'd to be understood, & some not? or know which are, and which are not? And indeed, if the end of God's giving a Revelation was to direct Mens thoughts and actions, it must (as necessary to that end) be deliver'd in such a way, as is plain & easy to be understood, even by mean capacities; and consequently, to suppose it dark and mysterious in any part, is to represent it as unworthy of having God for its Author. And,

ONE would think, that Men, when they knew they had truth on their side, would speak after the plainest manner, and not study to disguise it by unnatural ways of expressing themselves; especially, when they reflect on others for so doing.

THE *Christians* said, the *Heathens* were conscious their Religion was absurd, by their having recourse to allegorical, enigmatical, and mysterious explanations; and consequently, that it could not be design'd for the common people, incapable of such explanations; and that their Priests, instead of defending it, render'd it uncertain; since where the literal sense is omitted, there may be many allegorical, or spiritual senses, opposite to one another; and indeed, the wise Men among them, as *Tully*, &c. own'd as much.

NOR did the *Heathens* fail to retort the like objection upon the *Christians*; & in truth, they equall'd, if not out-did them in allegorising away, not only the plainest texts, but even matter of fact; which prov'd the occasion of innumerable Heresies.

Du Pin, speaking of the extravagant opinions, which obtain'd among silly people in the primitive times; says, * „ That they sprang from the principles of the „ *Pagan Philosophers*, and from the mysteries, which „ crack-brain'd Men put on the History of the Old „ and New Testament, according to their imaginations; the more extraordinary these opinions were, „ the more did they relish, and the better did they „ like them; and those who invented them, publish'd „ them gravely as great Mysteries to the simple, who „ were all dispos'd to receive them. „ But could any crack-brain'd Writers have found out more Mysteries in the Old and New Testament, than the primitive Fathers; (who interpreted them according to their imaginations, and jumbld them together with that

N 5 Pagan

Pagan Philosophy they were educated in?) Or have publish'd their mysterious reveries with greater gravity, to simple people, always dispos'd to receive what they do not understand?

THE same Author, speaking of St. *Barnabas's* Catholick Epistle in answer to this objection, „ That it „ was incredible so great an Apostle, full of the Holy „ Ghost, & Colleague of St. *Paul*, shou'd be the Author „ of such forc'd Allegories, and extravagant Explica- „ tions of Scripture; of those various fables con- „ cerning animals, with divers other conceits of the „ like nature; *says*, * „ They have but little know- „ ledge of the *Jewish* Nation, and of the primitive „ Christians educated in the Synagogues, who obli- „ nately believe, that such sort of notions cou'd not „ proceed from them; that on the contrary, it was „ their very character to turn the whole Scripture „ into Allegory. And,

I think, none of our celebrated Writers reject this Epistle as spurious, because of the allegories it abounds with: Our excellent Archbishop says, † „ Even St. *Paul* „ himself in his *Epistles*, receiv'd by us as *Canonical*, „ affords us not a few instances of this, which is so „ much found fault with in St. *Barnabas*: As I might „ easily make appear from a multitude of passages ‡ „ out of them, were it needful for me to enlarge „ myself on a point, which every one, who has read „ the *Scriptures* with any care, cannot choose but „ have observ'd. „ And those Christians St. *Paul* „ mentions, for *believing the resurrection was past*, were, no doubt, great Allegorists:

THE primitive Fathers exactly follow'd the precedent set them by the Apostle *Barnabas*, & other Apo-
stolical

* *Du Pin's Life of Barnabas* p. 6. col. 2. & 7 col. 1.

† *Wake's Life of Barnabas*, pag. 73.

‡ See 1 *Cor.* 10. 1. 4. *Gal.* 4. 21. *Eph.* 5. 31.
Heb. 9. 8. 23, 24. *1. Cor.* 10. 1. 4.

Stolical Men: *Clemens of Alexandria* says, * „ The
 „ œconomy of the Law, is typical and prophetic;
 „ & that *Moses* & the Prophets, wrote all in *Parables*.
 So *Tertullian* „ The Law is spiritual & prophetic,
 „ and almost in all points figurative. „ And *Le Clerc*
 „ observes, that † „ The Fathers did not content them-
 „ selves with interpreting the Old Testament allego-
 „ rically, but they did the same as to the New. „ --
 „ But because,

„ *Origen* was famous for this allegorical method, and
 „ by virtue of it esteem'd the greatest Champion of
 „ Christianity, next to the Apostles; & since what he
 „ says, was not only his own, but the sense of the then
 „ Church, it will not be improper to cite him. „ If we
 „ adhere, says he, ‡ to the letter, or understand what
 „ is written in the Law of God, as the Jews do, in
 „ the common acceptation of the words, I blush to
 „ own, that God ever gave such Laws; for mere
 „ human constitutions, as those of the Romans, *Athe-
 „ nians*, or *Lacedemonians*, will seem more reasonable
 „ and proper; but if the Law of God is to be under-
 „ stood in the sense the Church teaches, then truly
 „ it exceeds all human ordinances. „ For which
 „ reason he makes the allegorical way of interpreting
 „ Scripture to be the key of knowledge; & following
 „ the letter of the Law, the direct way to *Infidelity* &
 „ vain Superstition. § *Literam sequentes in Infidelitatem,*
 „ & *varias Superstitiones incurunt.* And he objects to
 „ *Marcion* the Heretick, that he was against the alle-
 „ gorical way of interpreting Scripture. ¶

B. Do.

* *Sermon* l. 2. c. 19. p. 403. B. l. 6. c. 15. p. 678. B.
 „ *Adv. Marc.* l. 2. c. 19.

† *Le Clerc's* Life of *Clem. Alexan.* Eng. Transl. p. 54.
 „ & *Biblioth. Univer.* To. 10. p. 236.

‡ *Homil.* 7. in *Levit.* To. 1. fol. 73. C. § *Homil.* 26.
 „ in *Mat.* fol. 50. E. ¶ *Epist. ad Rom.* c. 2. fol. 147. G.

B. Do not these Fathers suppose God either a weak Being, who could not frame as wise Laws as Men; or else an ill-natur'd Being, who, in order to puzzle Mankind, speaks in *riddles & mysteries*? What should we think of a Lawyer, who said, he shou'd be anim'd of the Laws of his own country, if taken in a literal sense; but that there was an allegorical sense which could one but hit, wou'd discover profound wisdom?

A. Thus the Fathers sufficiently acknowledg'd the sovereignty of Reason, in allegorising away matters of fact, that were in truth, uncapable of being allegoris'd; tho' that is but running into one unreasonable thing, to get rid of another: And how can we depend on any thing said in the Scripture, if we can't on its facts? One wou'd think nothing was a plainer fact, than that of *Lot's* lying with his two Daughters, yet St. *Irenaeus* * allegorises that away, and is so fond of allegorising, that for the sake of it, he contradicts the Scripture, & says, † „ The Harlot *Rahab* entertain'd three Spies; .. and had he not made them three, he wou'd have been at a loss, how to say as he does, that *this Harlot hid in her House, Father, Son, & Holy Ghost*. .. How can we be edify'd, says „ *Origen*, ‡ in reading that so great a Patriarch as „ *Abraham*, not only ly'd to King *Abimelech*, but also „ betray'd to him the chastity of his Wife? What in- „ structions can we reap from the Wife of so great „ a Patriarch, if we think she was expos'd to be de- „ bauch'd by her Husband's contrivance. Let the „ *Jews* believe such things, & those with them, who „ are greater friends to the letter than to the spirit. He asserts, § „ That there are even in the Gospel „ things said, which, according to the letter, or taken „ in their literal sense, are mere falsities; or lies; as

where

* *Lib. 4. c. 51. per totum.*

† *Lib. 4. c. 37. p. 336. col. 1. l. 36. &c. Josb. 2. 1.*

‡ *Hom. 6. in Gen. to. 1. fol. 12. H. 13. A.*

§ *Hom. 6. in Isa. fol. 106. D ==*

where our Saviour says, *He that believeth in me, the works that I do, shall he do also; & greater works than these shall he do.* John xiv. 12. &c., which he shews, was not verifi'd literally, but spiritually: And,

* THAT it was want of knowledge in the Scriptures, to think, that God spent six real days in the work of the Creation.

HE desires any one to shew, †, how the truth of the Gospels can be maintain'd, or their seeming contrarieties clear'd by any other than the analogical method; which he affirms necessary for that purpose.

HE says, ‡, The pair of *turtle-doves*, or two young *pidgeons*, offer'd for Jesus, were not such as we see with our carnal eyes; not *Birds*, such as fly in the air; but something divine & august, beyond human contemplation, &c.

IF you desire to be more plentifully furnish'd with Instances of the like nature with those abovemention'd, consult the *Philocalia* of Origen. §

ST. *Austin*, a Man of the greatest authority of all the Fathers, says, ¶, We must not take the story of *Jacob's* cheating his Father, by personating his Brother *Esau*, literally, lest the Scripture should seem to encourage *lying*; and speaking of Jesus cursing the *fig-tree*, says, ✕ *Hec factum, nisi figuratum factum invenitur.* And he, with the rest of the Fathers,* not only most unnaturally allegorises away the history of the Fall, but even of the whole Creation; & says, †, The whole World was created in an instant; &

* *Orig. contra Cels. l. 6. p. 310, 311. See Philocal. c. 1. p. 12.* † *Tom. 10. in Job. p. 150. D, E.*

‡ *Hom. 14. in Luc. p. 101. B. to. 3.* — § *Cap. 1. p. 12. & seqq. Edit. Cantab. 1658.* — ¶ *Contra Mendacium.*

✕ *C. 10. p. 44. 45. to. 4.* ✕ *Serm. 74. l. 2. de Gen.*

* *Contra Maniche. c. 17. & d.*

† *Tom. 3. lib. imperf. de Gen. ad Lit. c. 7. — &c.*

& tho' there is not one word about Angels in the text, yet this angelical Doctor makes part of the six days labour relate to the Creation of Angels.

B. BT how could he account for God's instituting the Sabbath, upon his resting from his six days labour, if all things were created in an instant?

A. HOW happy he was in allegorising, you may judge from his explaining that passage of *Genesis*, iii. 14. where the *Latin* Version which he follow'd, runs thus; * *Upon thy breast, & upon thy belly shall thou go; & dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.* By the *breast*, says he, is to be understood *pride*; by the *belly*, the *lusts of the flesh*; & by that which is added, *dust shalt thou eat*, is meant *curiosity*, which extends only to things temporal & earthly; & by *curiosity*, he means *Avarice*. And,

ST. *Amorose* will not allow the *Rainbow* to be the *bow*, which God plac'd in the *clouds*; and saith, † „ Far be it from us to call this God's *bow*; for this *bow*, „ which is call'd *iris*, is seen indeed, in the day, but „ never appears in the night: „ For which weighty reason, he substitutes in its room, a strange, allegorical *bow*, out of his own imagination.

IF the Fathers could allegorise away the most stubborn matters of fact, they could have no difficulty in allegorising away any other matter, where the words are capable of various senses. One would think, it was difficult to find out an allegorical meaning to this text, ‡ *O Daughter of Babylon, happy is he, who taketh, & dashes thy little ones against the stones*; yet nothing is too hard for *Origen*, who assures us, that the text intends, *The Man who dashes his vicious thoughts against the solid rock of reason.*

AND indeed, the Fathers have so turn'd, & twist'd the Scripture, with a pious intention to make it speak nothing

* *Lib. 2. de Gen. contra Manich. c. 17; 18. p. 841. B. T. 1.*

† *Lib. de Noe & Arca, 27.*

‡ *Origen contra Celsum, l. 7. p. 347.*

nothing but what they thought agreeable to Reason, hat they have render'd it like *Aristotle's Materia prima*; *nec quid, nec quale, nec quantum, nec aliquid eorum ullius ens determinatur*: For by making the Scripture, in so many places, say one thing, & mean another, they have destroy'd its certainty; since as *Le Clerc* observes, * „ If, according to this method, the sacred Writers had said quite another thing than what they said, or, if you will the quite contrary, yet one might find as good sense in them; as those that will try it will presently observe. -- Therefore the *Christians*, & the *Jews* wou'd have done much better to keep close to the letter, than to use so uncertain a method, to defend the holy Scripture against the *Pagans*.

B. ALL the Fathers do not allegorise like *Origen*; *Justin Martyr*, for instance, asserts, that the threatening, that † *in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely dye*, was literally fulfill'd, in that *Adam* did not live out a thousand years, which, with God, is but one day. But to go no further than the story of *Abraham's* prostituting his Wife; *St. Ambrósé*, ‡ to justify *Abraham's* conduct, roundly asserts, adultery to be no crime before the giving of the Law by *Moses*. And *St. Austin* § makes adultery still lawful, if Husband & Wife consent. *St. Jerom*, indeed ¶ runs into the other extrem, & approves the conduct of those, who kill'd themselves, to preserve their chastity. But the most eloquent *St. Chrysostom* ✕ enlarges very much in commendation of *Abraham* & *Sarah*, & says, „ Tho' nothing gives a Husband more uneasiness, than to imagine his Wife has to do with another; yet this just Man did what he cou'd, even to accomplish the act of adul-

* *Life of Clem. Alexand.* p. 54, 55. Engl. Transl. & Bibl. Univer. To. 10. p. 236, 237. † *Dialo. cum Tryph.* p. 89.

‡ *Lib. 1. de Aër. Patriar. c. 4.* See *Daille de usu Patr.* p. 271, 272. § *De civit. Dei*, l. 16. c. 25.

¶ *Com. en Jon. To. 6. p. 150. D.* ✕ *Hom. 32. in Gen.*

„ adultery. -- And adds, that *Sarah* too, (whom he sets as a pattern for all marry'd Women) accepted the proposal very courageously; and then cries out, „ Who can enough admire this readiness to obey her Husband? Who can sufficiently celebrate the praises of *Sarah*, who, after so long continence, & at her great age, readily consented to this act of adultery, „ and to let the *Barbarian* have the use of her body, „ to save her Husband?

A. MIGHT not those Fathers as well have allegoris'd, as talk'd thus absurdly? 'Tis chiefly owing to the *Papists* taking some words in a literal sense, relating to the *eating the Flesh, & drinking the Blood of the Son of Man*, that they come to be of a different Religion from the *Protestants*; and tho' two parties may agree, in taking the same words in an allegorical sense, yet by allegorising them differently, they may be of different Religions. By allegorising some texts, the *Jews* have made the *Messiah* a temporal Prince, the *Christians* a spiritual one. Mr. *Whiston* must think there are no words so plain, but are capable of being allegoris'd; since, he supposes the *Catholic Church* has all along allegoris'd plain love-songs, between *Salomon* & one of his *Mistresses*, into spiritual Hymns between *Christ* & his *Spouse*, the *Church*. And what Dr. *South* must have thought of the *Revelations*, I leave you to judge, when he does not scruple to call it † a mysterious, extraordinary Book; which, perhaps, the more 'tis study'd, the less 'tis understood; as generally finding a Man crack'd, or making him so. And had not the *Mahometan Divines* had the knack of allegorising nonsense, fools, & frantick persons wou'd not have been had in such honour and reverence among the *Muselmans*, ‡ only because their *Revelations* & *Enthusiasms* transported them out of the ordinary temper of hu-

* See Supplem. to his Essay, ab initio.

† South's Sermon. Vol. 2. pag. 467.

‡ Ricart's pref. State of the *Ottom. Emp.* B. 2. c. 4.

humanity. Therefore, upon the whole, I must needs say, happy is the Man, who is so far, at least, directed by the *Law of Reason*, and the *Religion of Nature*, as to suffer no mysteries, or unintelligible propositions; no allegories, no hyperboles, no metaphors, types, parables, or phrases of an uncertain signification, to confound his understanding. And certainly, the common Parent of Mankind is too good & gracious, to put the happiness of *all* his Children on any other doctrines, than such as plainly shew themselves to be the will of God, even to the ignorant and illiterate; if they have but courage & honesty to make use of their Reason: Otherwise the Scripture would not be plain in all necessary things, even to *babes & sucklings*.
 B. You suppose then, that the bulk of Mankind are taught by God himself, to know what Religion comes from him; even tho' they want letters, to make 'em capable of understanding those external proofs, on which all traditional Religions do, & must depend.

CHAP. XIII.

The Bulk of Mankind, by their Reason, must be able to distinguish between Religion & Superstition; otherwise they can never extricate themselves from that Superstition they chance to be educated in.

A. RELIGION either does not concern the majority, as being incapable of forming a judgment about it, or it must carry such internal marks of its truth, as men of mean capacity are able to discover; or else notwithstanding the infinite variety of Religions, all who do not understand the original languages their traditional Religions are written in, which is all Mankind, a very few excepted, are alike
 O bound

bound in all places to pin their Faith on their Priests, & believe in Men who have an interest to deceive them, and who have seldom fail'd to do so, when occasion served.

CAN People, if incapable by their Reason to distinguish truth from falsehood, have any thing more to plead for the truth of their Religion, than that they believe it to be the true Religion, because their Priests, who are hir'd to maintain it, tell them it was a long while ago reveal'd to certain Persons, who, as they, on their *Priestly* words, assure them, were too wise to be impos'd on themselves, & too honest to impose on others: And that no change cou'd have been made in their Religion in after-times; the care Men have of their own souls, as well as their natural affections for posterity, obliging them from generation to generation, to hand down their Religion just as they receiv'd it: And that it was morally impossible, innovations shou'd creep in, since it wou'd be the highest folly in any to attempt to introduce new doctrines; as a tradition receiv'd from their Ancestors, when all must know they had receiv'd no such tradition. As this is all, the bulk of Mankind, if they are not capable of judging from the Doctrines themselves of their truth, can say for their Religion, so they, in all places, make use of this argument, & with equal confidence aver, that, tho' all other traditionary Religions are full of gross falsehoods, & most absurd notions, which their Priests impudently impose on them as divine truths, yet our own Priests are such faithful representatives of things, that one may as well question the truth of all History, as the truth of things believ'd on their authority. Priests of other Religions, we know, will be for interest; & conscious that their traditional Religion will not bear examination, guard it with penal Laws; but we can never suspect that our own Priests, tho' they take the same methods, act on the same motives.

THIS

THIS boasted argument, in which Men of all Religions so much triumph, if it proves any thing, would prove there never was, nor cou'd be any false Religion, either in whole, or part; because Truth being before Falsehood, and Mens Ancestors having once possess'd it, no change cou'd afterward ever happen: Whereas, on the contrary, tho' there have been at times great numbers of traditional Religions, yet as far as it appears, no one of them has long remain'd the same; at least, in such points as were merely founded on tradition.

I see no middle, but that we must either own, that there are such internal marks fix'd to every part of the true Religion, as will enable the bulk of Mankind to distinguish it from all false Religions; or else that all traditional Religions are upon a level: Since those, who, in every country, are hir'd to maintain them, will not fail to assert, they have all external marks; such as *uninterrupted traditions, contested miracles, confession of adversaries, number of proselytes, agreement among themselves*, and all those other external arguments, that the *Papists & Mahometans* set so high a value on: In this case, what can the common people do, who understand not a word of the language, their Religion & its external proofs are writ in, but be of the Religion in which they are educated; especially, if nothing is suffer'd to be publish'd, which may, in the least, tend to make them question its truth; and all other Religions are represented as full of the grossest absurdities.

HAD the People of *Rome*, in the primitive times of Christianity, been govern'd by external marks, none of them had quitted their old Religion, which had every external mark proper to recommend it; and under which they were so bless'd, as to become Masters of the best part of the known world. But

BECAUSE this is a point, wherein the greatest part of Mankind are, at all times, nearly concern'd,

I shall beg leave to mention, tho' it be somewhat long, what Mr. *Lock* says on this head.

„ * HAVE the bulk of Mankind no other Guide;
 „ but accident, & blind chance, to conduct them to
 „ their happiness, or misery? Are the current opinions,
 „ & licensed Guides of every Country sufficient evi-
 „ dence and security to every Man, to venture his
 „ greatest concerns on; nay, his everlasting hap-
 „ piness, or misery? Or, can those be the certain &
 „ infallible oracles & standards of truth, which teach
 „ one thing in *Christendom*, and another in *Turkey*?
 „ Or shall a poor Country-man be eternally happy,
 „ for having the chance to be born in *Italy*; or a
 „ day-labourer be unavoidably lost, because he had
 „ the ill luck to be born in *England*? How ready
 „ some Men may be to say some of these things,
 „ I will not here examine; but this I am sure, that
 „ Men must allow one or other of these to be true;
 „ (let them chuse which they please) or else grant,
 „ that God has furnished Men with faculties suffi-
 „ cient to direct them in the way they shou'd take,
 „ if they will but seriously employ them that way,
 „ when their ordinary vocations allow them the lei-
 „ sure. -- † There can't be a more dangerous thing
 „ to rely on than the opinion of others, nor more
 „ likely to mislead one; since there is much more
 „ falsehood & error among Men than truth & know-
 „ ledge: And if the opinions & persuasions of others,
 „ whom we know, & think well of, be a ground of
 „ assent, Men have reason to be *Heathens* in *Japan*;
 „ *Mahometans* in *Turkey*, *Papists* in *Spain*, *Protestants*
 „ in *England*, and *Lutherans* in *Sweden*.

WAS there a set of Priests, on whose authority
 the common people were every where to depend for
 their religious sentiments, they must be known by
 some plain, external marks: To say the People must
 follow

† *Of human Understand. l. 4. c. 19. Sect. 3. p. 399. Edit. 2.*

‡ *Ibid. l. 4. c. 15. Sect. 6. Edit. 2.*

follow those Priests that are in the right, is to suppose People must judge what is right; and then judge (if that concern'd them) whether any set of Priests are in the right: and if Men can't believe, when they see no reason for believing, what reason can the bulk of Mankind have to prefer one Religion before a number of others, on the account of such things, as, upon Priestly authority, are believ'd to belong to every one of them; such as *visions, dreams, trances, extasies, inspirations, conference with Spirits, traditionary reports about miracles, &c.* And shou'd the chance of education throw Men into the *true* traditionary Religion, yet considering its style is not very exact, there being generally more express'd than is meant, & things of the greatest consequence are often so treated, as that Men can't from thence perceive the nature and extent of their duty; & even Precepts of the greatest moment are sometimes so far from being deliver'd plainly & simply, that they are express'd after a general, undetermin'd, nay, hyperbolical manner; so that even in this case, there's a necessity for the common people to have recourse to the Reason of things.

Are not the unlearned wholly unacquainted with those *keys of solution* (as they are call'd) which the learned have such frequent recourse to; such as those of a *transposition of words, or clauses, errors of copies, various readings; various meanings of the same word; punctuation, taking away, or adding of the negative particle; allusion to customs, consideration of the matter in hand, exaggeration, interrogation, parenthesis, literal sense, figurative sense; want of exactness in the sacred Writers, prudence in concealing some things, or in complying with some opinions prevailing in their times; condescension to Pagans or Jews; using such ideas as prevail'd in such a Religion, prejudication in the hearers, answers suitable to their needs, rather than to their queries, compendious expressions, phraseology of that time, the author's nation,*

or native country; parallel passages, precepts peculiar to the Apostles, advices to perfection, censures against certain Hereticks; the circumstances of the subject, the scope of the author, what goes before, &c. what follows, the barrenness of the Hebrew tongue; and consequently, its ambiguity, its particular idioms, the various senses of the same verb in different conjugations, the want of certain ways of expression us'd in other tongues, the sublime & metaphorical expressions most frequent in the oriental languages, the imitation of the Hebrew idiom in the LXX Version, and in the original text of the New Testament Greek of the Synagogue, &c.

THE bulk of Mankind being incapable of metaphysical speculations, and their understandings giv'n them to discern those rules of action which God prescribes them, he has, no doubt, adjust'd one to the other; and consequently, the simplicity, the reasonableness, the conveniency & usefulness of these Rules, point them out to be the will of God, to Men in all places, and conditions of life; but to carry things further, can only serve the designs of ill Men, who have taken an occasion from thence to abuse their credulity to the vilest purposes.

CAN, for instance, the common people, who understand not a word of the language, the Jewish Books are writ in; be better judges than the Jews themselves of the meaning of their own Books; and of their own Prophets speaking in their own language? Or, are the common People capable of judging of the innumerable disputes among Christians; if those likewise depend, not on the Reason of Things, but on the critical understanding of Books, written in dead languages; nay, what do they know of the distinguishing doctrines of their own Churches? They, indeed, on all sides, know whom their leaders would have them hate, but little, or nothing of those opinions which divide their leaders.

B. Is there any Divine of note, who makes Revelation thus difficult to be understood by the ignorant, & unlearned?

A. I shall mention one, against whom you have no exception, who represents it thus obscure, even to the learned. Is not Bishop Taylor (highly esteem'd for his devotional, as well as polemical works) a competent judge in this matter? And he (summing up, & that very briefly, what he had spent several chapters to prove at large: *says*; * „ Since there are so many „ copies with infinite varieties of reading; since a „ various interpunction, a parenthesis, a letter, an „ accent may much alter the sense; since some places „ have divers literal senses, many have spiritual, „ mystical and allegorical meanings; since there are „ so many Tropes, Metonymies, Ironies, Hyperboles, „ proprieties and improprieties of language, whose „ understanding depends upon such circumstances, „ that it is almost impossible to know the proper interpretation: now that the knowledge of such circumstances, & particular stories is irrecoverably lost: „ † Since there are some mysteries, which, at the best „ advantage of expression are not easy to be apprehended, and whose explication, by reason of our „ imperfections, must needs be dark, sometimes unintelligible. And lastly, since those ordinary means „ of expounding Scripture, as searching the originals, conference of places, parity of reason, analogy of faith, are all dubious, uncertain; & very fallible: „ He that is the wisest, & by consequence, the likeliest to expound truth, in all probability of reason, „ will be very far from confidence, because every „ one of them, & many more, are like so many degrees of improbability & incertainty, all depressing „ our certainty of finding out truth in such mysteries, „ & amidst so many difficulties.

O. 4. AND

AND in another place, * „ The obscurity of some „ queltions; the niceties of some articles, the intricacy „ of some Revelations, the variety of human under- „ standings, the windings of logick, the tricks of ad- „ versaries, the subtilty of sophisters, the engagements „ of educations, personal affections, the portentous „ number of writers, the infinity of authorities, the „ vastness of some arguments, consisting in an ennu- „ meration of many particulars, the uncertainty of „ others, the several degrees of probability, the diffi- „ culties of Scripture, the invalidity of probation, of „ Tradition, the opposition of all exterior arguments „ to one another, and their open contestation, the „ publick violence done to Authors and Records, „ the private arts and supplantings, the falsifyings, „ the indefatigable industry of some Men to abuse all „ understandings, and all persuasions into their own „ opinions: These, & a thousand more, have made „ it impossible for any Man in so great a variety of „ matter, not to be deceiv'd., And I might add in „ confirmation of the Bishop's sentiments, & demonstrate „ too, were it not endless to go through particulars, „ that there's scarce a text, except in things of their own „ nature evident, where Commentators do not differ. „ Whether these considerations alone, be not a sufficient „ reason for the unlearned to adhere to those plain, „ simple truths the Light of Nature dictates, I leave „ you to judge?

AND do not other Divines, in effect, say the same, „ when they make Religion not to be implanted in „ human-nature, but an art so far above the capacity of „ common people, that it requires great learning and „ labour to be competently skill'd in it; and tell us, „ that they, who have spent their time in studying it, „ can't have too much honour, or too great rewards „ given them for deciding for the People, points of Re- „ ligion, as the common Law Judges do points of pro- „ perty;

* Ibid. pag. 521.

erty; & that People justly incur the dreadful *Anathema* pronounc'd in Synods & Councils, against those who refuse to submit to their decisions: and that 'tis the duty of the Magistrate to see their decrees put in execution.

A right in Priests, whether in, or out of *Convocations*, to judge; & determine for the People, what they shall believe & profess, supposes it a duty in them so to believe, & so to profess; and consequently, that the Religion of the *Laity* consists in believing in their Priests, and that whatever they decree, is to be the rule of their actions.

B. This is too severe, they only claim a power of interpreting the Laws of Christ, not of making new Laws themselves.

A. THERE'S only a verbal difference between a Lawmaker, and a sovereign Interpreter of Laws, to whose interpretation all are oblig'd to submit; so that ever since the Council of -- People have been taught to renounce both Natural & Reveal'd Religion; and become Priest-worshippers, & to have a divine faith in their dictates, and indeed, so they ought, if these Priests had, as they claim, a judicial power to determine of Mens condition hereafter, and thereby make God a meer executioner of their Sentences, by which they bind, or loose Mens sins to eternity.

As this notion carries with it the highest blasphemy and idolatry, so I think it is treated too gently by Mr. *Chillingworth*, in saying, * „This presumptuous „imposing of the senses of Men upon the words of „God, the special senses of Men upon the general „words of God, & laying them upon Mens Con- „sciences together under the equal penalty of death „& damnation, this vain conceit, that we can speak „of the things of God better than the words of God, „this deifying our own interpretations, & tyrannous

* *Chillingworth's Relig. of Protest. Part. I. c. 4. Sect. 16. p. 152. Edit. 5.*

„ inforcing them upon others, this restraining of the
 „ word of God from that latitude & generality, and
 „ the understanding of Men from that liberty, wherein
 „ Christ & the Apostles left them; is, & hath been
 „ the only fountain of all the *Schisms* of the Church,
 „ & that which makes them immortal; the common
 „ incendiary of *Christendom*, and that which tears in
 „ pieces, not the coat, but the bowels and members
 „ of Christ, *Ridente Turca, nec dolente Judae*.

„ In short, True Religion can't but be plain, simple,
 „ and natural, as design'd for all Mankind, adapted to
 „ every capacity, & suited to every condition and cir-
 „ cumstance of life; and if it be render'd otherwise, is
 „ it not owing to those, who have made it their business
 „ to puzzle Mankind, & render plain things obscure;
 „ in order to get the consciences. & consequently, the
 „ properties of the People at their disposal; and to be
 „ in a manner ador'd, notwithstanding the grossest im-
 „ moralities, as the sole dispensers of such things, as no
 „ ways relate to the good of the community; and to
 „ destroy all that will not comply with their pernicious
 „ designs, as enemies of God, and his holy Church?
 „ And,

Tho' the Clergy have taken all possible methods
 for a blind submission, & a forc'd uniformity, yet they
 have not been able to hinder *Christians* from being
 endlessly divided, even in what they call *fundamentals*;
 and tho' no one Sect, as far as I can find, have ven-
 tur'd to give us a compleat set of their *fundamentals*,
 yet all Sects unanimously own, that those things which
 are necessary to the salvation of *Christians*, must be
 so plain, as that all *Christians*, even those of the meanest
 capacities, may apprehend them. Would not one think,
 that a little honest reflection shou'd carry them further,
 and make them see, that it is inconsistent with the
 universal & unlimited goodness of the common Parent
 of Mankind, nor to make that which is necessary for
 the salvation of all Men, so plain, as that all Men
 may

may know it; tho' one wou'd be apt to think, that by the number & oddness of those things, which in most Churches Divines have made necessary to salvation, they were more zealous to damn others than to save themselves, or at least, that they thought there was no room in Heaven for any, but Men of their own narrow principles. But,

LET me ask these charitable Gentlemen, Whether the happiness of others wou'd make *Christians* unhappy? Or, what prejudice it will be to them, to suppose God is no *Respecter of Persons*, but that all may come to him, who believe that *he will reward those in all nations, and at all times, who have diligently sought him?*

NATURAL Religion, which is of the greatest importance to Mankind, & is a perpetual standing Rule for Men of the meanest, as well as highest capacity, carries its own evidence with it, those internal, inseparable marks of truth: but can that be said of any Religion, which depends on tradition? Does not that want foreign aid & assistance? Ought we not to be certain, that the first propagators of it cou'd not be impos'd on themselves, or wou'd not impose on others? Or in other words, were infallible, and impeccable? But since numbers have taken their reveries for divine inspirations, ought we not to have certain marks to distinguish one from the other? Nor is this alone sufficient, for if evil Beings can impress notions in Mens minds as strongly as good Beings, and cause miracles to be done in confirmation of them; is there any way to know, to which of the two notions thus impress'd are owing, but from their nature and tendency, or those internal marks of wisdom & goodness, by which they plainly shew themselves to be part of Natural Religion? If so, can external proofs carry us further than the internal proofs do? But,

It is not enough to be certain, these Men were not impos'd on; we must be as certain, they wou'd

on no occasion whatever impose on others; or in other words, were not Men of like passions & infirmities with other mortals. Does not the Scripture give very many instances of inspir'd persons as much govern'd by their passions, as uninspir'd? Was not *Abraham*, tho' a Prophet, & so dear to God, that he would not destroy a neighbouring Town * without acquainting him with it, guilty of an incestuous marriage, his Wife being his Sister by the Father's side? † And did he not endeavour to betray her chastity to two Kings, ‡ in disowning her to be his Wife, by which conduct, he got from one of them, who § entreated him well for her sake, Men & Maid-Servants, Sheep, oxen, asses, & camels; and from the other, ¶ a thousand pieces of Silver, besides, Sheep, Oxen, Men & Women-Servants? And immediately after ✕ his Faith was counted to him for righteousness, did he not doubt of God's promise, till God spoke to him in a deep sleep?

Was not *David*, tho' a Prophet, & a Man after God's own heart, guilty of many enormous crimes, from the time he design'd to have murder'd all the males in *Nabal's* Family, * because he would not pay contributions to him, & those Men, † who out of debt, discontent & distress join'd him? tho' *Nabal*, by so doing, might have incurr'd the fate of those Priests, from whom, *David*, by several falsehoods, got both *Shew-bread*, ‡ and *Goliath's* Sword. What could be more treacherous, than his invading people, that were at least, in peace, if not Allies of the King of *Gath*, § to whom he fled for safety; and having neither sav'd Man or Woman alive to bring tidings, told his generous Protector, he had been making an in-road into *Judaea*?

* Gen. 18. 17. † 20. 12. ‡ 12. 10. 20. 2.
§ 12. 16. ¶ 20. 16. ✕ 15. 6. 8. 12. 13. 14.
* 1 Sam. 25. 22. † 22. 2. ‡ 21. 6. 9. § 27. 8-12.

In a word, (not to mention his treatment of *Uriah*, which no brave Man can think of without horror,) did he not leave the world in a very unforgiving temper, when the last thing he commanded his Son *Solomon* was, * to put *Shimei* to death; tho' he had sworn before the Lord, that he † would not put him to death; & that he should not dye?

SOLOMON, tho' inspir'd with wisdom from above, & had conferences with God himself, yet his passion for Women, made him guilty of gross Idolatry. And not to multiply instances, we find one Man of God lying to another Man of God in the name of God, purely for the pleasure of making him ‡ eat bread, & drink water with him. And if we go to the New Testament, 'tis plain, by what our Saviour says to those, who § had prophesied, & cast out Devils, & done many wonderful works in his name, depart from me, ye that work iniquity; that neither prophecies, nor miracles are absolute securities for Men to depend on. Nay, do we not find one of the Apostles, tho' he, with the rest, had the power of doing Miracles, even to the ¶ raising of the dead, betraying his Master for the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver? And the other Apostles not only fled, & deserted him, but the chief of them seſſwore him, ✠ as often as he was ask'd about his being one of his followers; and he, as well as *Barnabas*, * was afterwards guilty of a mean piece of dissimulation. And *Paul* & *Barnabas* † had such a sharp contention, tho' about a very indifferent matter, as to cause a separation: And even *St. Paul* says, ‡ The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. -- But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. And a great deal more to the same purpose. Do

* 1 Kings 2. 8, 9. † 2 Sam. 19. 23. ‡ 1 Kings 13. 18.
§ Mat. 7. 22, 23. ¶ 10. 8. ✠ 26. 72.
* Gal. 2. 13. † Acts 15. 39. ‡ Rom. 7. 19. 23.

Do not these instances, tho' many more might be added, plainly shew, that inspir'd Persons, whether Prophets or Apostles, are subject to the same passions, even to dissembling & lying, as other Men? And that we sin against that Reason, which was given us to distinguish between Good & Evil, Religion & Superstition, if we do not by it examine all doctrines whatsoever, and by whomsoever deliver'd? But supposing Prophets & Apostles impeccable as well as infallible; yet what certainty can people have, that those things which were taught by them have been faithfully convey'd down for many generations together by Men, who were far from being infallible, or impeccable? So that here, certainly, they ought to make use of their Reason, in judging of all doctrines thus convey'd. Admitting Tradition has been a faithful conveyancer, yet how can the common People be certain the Scripture has been truly translated? But, granting even that; yet since most texts have vastly vary'd, & sometimes contrary interpretations, & the literal sense very often *kills*, how can they be confident they do not mistake their meaning, except the Reason of Things makes it evident? But supposing no such uncertainty in the meaning of texts, yet since the Scripture contains some Precepts, which are occasional; obliging only certain persons, upon certain occasions, & in certain circumstances, and others that are of an eternal obligation, & makes no distinction in delivering them; can Men, even the most learned, have any other way of knowing one from the other, but from the nature of the precepts: & that those only are of an eternal obligation, which are founded on the eternal Reason of Things: & which would eternally oblige, whether deliver'd in Scripture, or not? And,

LET me further add, that to make external Revelation of any use, must we not, as I have already observ'd, be able to determine, whether God is oblig'd to act, as he declares in it he will do? And in order

CHRISTIANITY AS OLD

„ have obscur'd the simplicity of it, and prejudic'd
 „ many against entertaining, and believing it.
 „ If Natural Religion is not part of the Religion of
 „ Christ, 'tis scarce worth while to enquire at all what
 „ his Religion is: If it be, then the preaching Na-
 „ tural Religion is preaching Christ. -- * The Reli-
 „ gion of Christ must be understood, before it can
 „ or ought to be believ'd; and it must be proved to
 „ be a consistent, & rational Religion, before they can
 „ be under any obligation to receive it.
 „ And, indeed, why shou'd not every Man insist
 „ upon those things? The only consequence that I
 „ can imagine can flow from it is, not that the cause
 „ of Christianity will suffer, which will stand the test
 „ of the most impartial inquiry, but that the rigid
 „ directors of the faith and consciences of Men will
 „ lose their authority, and human schemes & creeds,
 „ that have been set up in the room of Christianity,
 „ will fall into the contempt they so justly deserve.
 „ -- 'Tis my hearty prayer to *the Father of Lights*,
 „ and *the God of Truth*, that all human authority in
 „ matters of Faith, may come to a full end; and that
 „ every one, who hath Reason to direct him, & a
 „ soul to save, may be his own Judge in every thing
 „ that concerns his eternal welfare, without any pre-
 „ vailing regard to the dictates of fallible Men, or
 „ fear of their peevish, & impotent censures. And
 „ in this prayer, I believe, every honest Man will join.
 „ THE Reverend and judicious Mr. Bullock, in sum-
 „ ming up what I have been endeavouring to prove at
 „ large, says, † „ A Revelation coming from God, unless
 „ it cou'd be known to be such, is in effect the same,
 „ as having none at all. --- Shall a Man, *says he*,
 „ embrace the first Religion that offers itself to him,
 „ & without seeking any further, stick close to the
 „ principles of his education? If this were safe, then
 „ all the contradictory notions that are in the world,
 „ would

* 1612. pag. 9, 10, 11. † Sermon. pag. 32, 4.

„ would be equally safe & true; and there could be
 „ no such thing as a false Religion, or the spirit of
 „ error any where: But this will not be admitted.
 „ Is truth, then, confin'd to any certain country, or
 „ to any particular set of Men? No: But if it were,
 „ still there would remain this difficulty, to be assur'd
 „ to what country, or to what sort of Men it belong'd:
 „ If this were all the rule we had to go by, every
 „ Man (no doubt) would be partial to his own
 „ country, & to those Men he is best acquainted with.
 „ And so the principles of education must prevail
 „ every where, instead of true Religion.

„ In answer to these, & such like objections, he says,
 „ * We are well assur'd, that God is the Author of
 „ our beings, & all our faculties; and we cannot but
 „ acknowledge, that our understanding is the most
 „ excellent faculty he has given us: It is in that we
 „ excel the beasts that perish; & it was plainly given
 „ us with this intent, that by a due use and applica-
 „ tion thereof we might discern truth from error;
 „ that which is just & fit to be done, or observed by
 „ us, from that which is not. -- Should we, there-
 „ fore, admit any thing, as a Revelation coming
 „ from him, which contradicts the evident dictates
 „ of our Reason, we sacrifice one Revelation, that
 „ which God gave us with our very beings, to make
 „ way for another, which is inconsistent with it. It
 „ is in effect admitting, that the judgment of our own
 „ minds is in no case to be depended upon; that the
 „ faculties thereof, the very best gift which God has
 „ given us, are of no real use & service to us; no,
 „ not even in discerning which doctrines come from
 „ God, and which do not: For, if I cannot depend
 „ upon the plainest dictates of Reason, how can I be
 „ assur'd, that any doctrine is a Revelation from God?
 „ If I receive it without consulting my Reason, then
 „ for ought I know, it may be an imposture; and I

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„ am every way as liable to embrace an error, as the
 „ truth. But if I embrace it upon the tryal & con-
 „ viction of my Reason, then 'tis plain, I admit the
 „ principles of Reason are to be depended upon;
 „ which if I do, I cannot consistently admit any thing
 „ as true, which contradicts it.

To apply this Author's reasonings, God is frequently said *to swear*, nay, in both Old and New Testament, ** to swear in wrath*. Now, if we are to admit nothing that is repugnant to the natural notion we have of God, ought we not to examine by our Reason, whether God, who has no superior to invoke, can swear at all, much less be in a passion, & swear in wrath?

AGAIN, If there are ever so many texts, which seemingly confine salvation to a belief, to which the greatest part of Mankind are utter strangers, or else have not had sufficient reason to see they were oblig'd to examine into it; or if they did, could not find out its truth; must it not, by this Author's reasoning, be my duty to consider, whether this is consistent with the character we have from the Light of Nature, of the impartial & universal goodness of God, to damn Men for impossibilities? Or, whether one can be said to be sent as a Saviour of Mankind, if he comes to shut Heaven's gates against those, to whom before they were open, provided they follow'd the dictates of their Reason?

IF, besides these, there are innumerable texts, which, in the plainest manner words can express, impute human parts, human infirmities, and human passions, even of the worst kind, to God, does not this suppose, that even all have a right to examine, & consequently, sufficient understanding to judge, when texts, taken in their plain, obvious meaning, are, or are not consistent with what the Light of Nature teaches them of the character of the supreme Being? What Notions

must

* Deut. 1. 34. Psalm 95. 11. Heb. 3. 11.

must the Vulgar have of God, if the Light of Nature can't direct them right, when they find he is said * to be jealous & furious? And God himself says, † *My fury shall come up in my face, for in my jealousy, & in the fire of my wrath have I spoken*; with a number of other expressions of the like nature? Nay, does not the Scripture, if taken literally, suppose, that God does things of the greatest moment in anger & fury? Was it not thus he gave his favourite People, ‡ *statutes; which were not good, and judgments, by which they could not live*? And does not St. Peter (to mention no other Apostle) tho' a Jew, call the Jewish Law, given by God, § *a yoke, that neither we, nor our Forefathers could bear*? In what a number of places is God said to do things to try people; & yet notwithstanding this caution, how often is he said to repent? Does he not even repent of the first action he did in relation to Man? ¶ *He repented that he made Man, & is grieved him at his heart*. Nay, does not the Scripture suppose he has so often repented, that he is ✠ *weary of repenting*? What strange notions must the bulk of Mankind cou'd not their Reason direct them right, have of the supreme Being, when he is said * to have rested, & to be refreshed; & that † *Wine cheereth both God & Man*? And what is yet stranger, such actions are attributed to him, as can only belong to the lowest ranks of Creatures, such as *hissing*; God being in three places ‡ in the Prophets said to hiss; and in one place *to hiss for the Fly, that is in the uttermost part of the River of Egypt, & for the Bee, that is in the land of Assyria*?

P. DIVINES tell us, we must recede from the letter, when the nature of the thing requires it; that is, when it contains any notion, or fact, which our Reason tells us, is unworthy of God, as being in-

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* *Nab. 1. 2.* † *Ezek. 38. 18, 19.* ‡ *Id. 20. 21. 25.*

§ *Acts 15. 10.* ¶ *Gen. 6. 6.* ✠ *Jer. 15. 6.*

* *Exod. 31. 17.* † *Judges 9. 13.*

‡ *Isa. 5. 26. Zach. 10. 8. Isa. 7. 18.*

consistent with his Wisdom, Goodness, Justice Immortality, impartial and universal Benevolence, or any other of his perfections; or any ways clashes with those duties, that Men as Men, or Creatures of the same Creator, owe their Fellow-Creatures.

A. I should think that Man was unreasonable, who requir'd a greater scope in reading any book, than what these Divines allow him in reading the Scripture; especially, considering the frequent occasion he will have to exercise his reasoning faculty, in allegorising away facts deliver'd after the plainest manner: As for instance, If Reason tells us, that God, the only true God is *invisible*, we must not interpret those numerous texts literally, which suppose him to have been so often seen by mortal eyes: No, nor even those which represent him for many days together visible on Mount Sinai, where what was under his feet is mention'd; and that the * *Nobles on whom God laid not his hand, saw God, & did eat, & drink*. And Bishop Patrick says, † „ That after they saw God, they were so far from „ receiving any harm, that they feasted with him „ upon the relics of the Peace-Offerings, with great „ joy & gladness. „ And tho' 'tis said, ‡ *God spake to Moses face to face*, as a Man does to his Friend, yet for the same reason, that text must not be interpreted literally.

B. THAT'S certain, since God, in the same Chapter, says to Moses, ‡ *Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no Man see me, & live*.

A. DOES not God immediately add, § *Behold: here is a place by me, & thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and I will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by. And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back-parts; but my face shall not be seen: And since Reason tells us, God* has

* Exod. 24. 10, 11. § Comment on the Place.

† Exod. 33. 11. ‡ Ibid. 33. 20. § Ib. ver. 21, 22, 23.

has neither fore-parts, nor back-parts, must not the *rock*, the *clift of the rock*, & the *hand that cover'd Moses in this clift*, and the *back-parts* seen upon taking away the hand, be understood by Men of the meanest capacity, in a spiritual sense?

ACCORDING to the acknowledg'd Maxims, you have laid down from Divines, we must not take literally the two conferences mention'd in the first & second of *Job* between God and Satan; when *Satan*, in very good company, with the *Sons of God*, presented himself before the Lord; who, when Satan would not otherwise be satisfy'd of *Job's* integrity, permitted him to *slay Job's Children & Servants*, & reduce him to extremity to make the experiment. The same may be said of the Lord's saying at another time to Satan, *standing at the right hand of the Angel of the Lord*, to resist the High Priest *Joſhua*, standing likewise before him, * *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan*: And must we not think it as unworthy of God, to talk to a Serpent as to *Satan*? Or, how can we conceive a Serpent could talk to *Eve*, & delude the Mother of Mankind, tho' in the high state of perfection; even tho' the Apostle says, † *The Serpent deceiv'd Eve by his subtilty*.

SOME are induced to imagine, that the Author of the Book of *Genesis* thought, that words had ideas naturally fix'd to them, and not by consent: Otherwise, say they, how can we account for his supposing, that God brought all animals before *Adam*, as soon as he was created, to give them names; & that ‡ *whatsoever Adam call'd every living creature, that was the name thereof*; and that the Serpent & *Eve*, almost as soon as created, entertain'd one another in the same language: And some think, that this Author did not know the reason of the necessary variety of language upon the increase of Mankind, by making God to come down to see the City and Tower, whose

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* *Zech.* 3. 1. 2. † *2 Cor.* 11. 3. ‡ *Gen.* 2. 19.

was design'd to reach to Heaven; and then saying, *this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrain'd from them; which they have imagin'd to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their Language.* * And, perhaps, the not knowing the natural cause of the Rain-bow, occasion'd that account we have in Genesis of its institution.

As to the story of an Angel of God's wrestling all night with Jacob, † and then *laming; & blessing him, & changing his name;* „ Interpreters of note, whether „ *Jews or Christians* (as Mr. Nye observes) ‡ under- „ stood it done, not in fact, but in vision only; „ tho' one would imagine the *Jews* thought it literally true, because the text says, § *They eat not of the finew, that finew, which I brank, unto this very day.*

What a number of ideas must Balaam's Ass have had, to be able to reason with his Master, when he saw, & knew an Angel? And tho' 'tis said by Peter, ¶ *that the dumb Ass speaking with Man's voice, forbod the madness of the Prophet;* yet in the story itself, there does not appear any thing like madness: For that Prophet did nothing but what the Lord enjoin'd him; and declares, tho' Balak *would give me his house full of silver or gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, my God.* And when he went with Balaam's second messengers, it was by the express command of God; and yet the text says, ✠ *God's anger was kindl'd because he went:* And then follows the dialogue between the Ass and his Master.

How many commands did God give his Prophets, which if taken according to the letter, seem unworthy of God, as making them act like mad-men, or idiots? As for instance, the Prophet Isaiah * *walk'd for three years; together naked for a Sign.* Jeremiab is commanded

* Gen. 11. 4. 6, 7. † Ibid. 32. 24, 25, 28, 29.

‡ Nye of Nat. & Rev. Relig. p. 203. § Gen. 32. 32.

¶ 2 Pet. 2. 16. ✠ Num. 22. 22. * Isa. 20. 3.

reed. And *Tertullian* assures us, * „, that in his time; „ there was seen for forty days together; a City „ hanging in the air over *Judea*. „ And yet Interpreters have since allegoris'd this great City into a meet Castle in the air. But,

To come to things of greater moment; did not the Scripture suppose Reason was able to teach Men of the meanest capacity, that God cou'd not be deceiv'd himself, or deceive us, the Prophet *Jeremiah* wou'd not have said, † O Lord, thou hast deceiv'd me, and I was deceiv'd; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed. -- † Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a Liar, and as waters that fail? And in another Prophet the Lord says. § The days are prolonged, and every vision fails. And tho' the Lord adds, There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done; yet he afterwards says, ¶ If the Prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I, the Lord, have deceived that Prophet. And if the Prophet is deceived, must not the people, who rely on that Prophet, be deceived? And does not the Prophet *Jeremiah* say, * Ah! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people? And to the same purpose the Prophet *Isaiah*, * O Lord, thou hast made us to err.

THERE are other texts which go further, and, if taken literally, represent God not only falsifying his word, but his Oaths. To mention two, the first relates to the Children of *Israhel*, to whom the Lord said, † Ye shall not come into the land concerning which I swear to make you dwell; & ye shall know my breach of promise. The second is in *Psalms* 89. in the first part of which is largely set forth the promises of God to *David* by covenant & oath; and in the other part *David* complains of God's breach, both of his covenant; & his oath; and in summing up those breaches

* *Contra Marcion* l. 3. c. 24. † *Jer.* 20. 7. † *Id.* 15. 18.
§ *Ezek.* 12. 22. 28. ¶ *Id.* 14. 9. * *Jer.* 4. 10.
* *Isa.* 63. 17. † *Num.* 14. 30. 34.

c says, * *Thou hast made void the Covenant of thy servants: † Lord, where are thy former loving kindnesses which thou swear'st to David in thy truth?* And there are several facts mention'd in Scripture, which, if taken literally, look as tho' the Prophets either were deceiv'd themselves, or were willing to deceive others. The Prophetess *Hilda* assures good King *Jesiah* from the Lord, † that he shou'd be gather'd to his grave in peace; and yet soon after he receiv'd a mortal wound §, of which he dy'd. The Prophet *Elisha* ¶ sends word to *Benbadad*, the King of *Syria*, who consults him about his recovery, that he may, (or rather shall, or will, for so it ought to be render'd,) certainly recover; yet he tells *Hazaël*, who had a design on his Crown and life (and who before had been anointed King of *Syria* by the Prophet *Elijah*, ✕) that *he should surely die*. And this look'd the more ungrateful in the Prophet, because he had receiv'd forty Camel loads of the good thing of *Damascus*, * to tell the King the truth. But I need not mention single Prophets deceiving, or being deceiv'd, when the Scripture tells us of four hundred being deceiv'd at once, † to the destruction of a number of innocent persons. I saw, says the Prophet *Micaiah*, † the Lord sitting upon his throne, & all the Host of Heaven standing on his right hand, and on his left. And the Lord said, who shall entice *Ahab* King of *Israel*, that he may go up, and fall at *Ramoth-gilead*? And one spake, saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a Spirit, & stood before the Lord, & said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, *Wherewith?* And he said I will go out, & be a lying Spirit in the mouth of all his Prophets. And the Lord said, thou shalt entice him, & thou shalt also prevail. Go out, & do even so.

P 5

As

* *Psalm* 89. 39. † *ib.* *vrr.* 49. † *2 Chron.* 34. 28. § *ib.* 35. 23.
 † *2 Kings* 8. 7-10. ✕ *1 Kings* 19. 15. * *2 Kings* 8. 8, 9.
 † *2 Chron.* 18. 5, 22. † *ibid.* 18. 5. 18. 21, 22.

As to the new-Testament, I shall now only observe that tho' St. *Jude* * quotes (besides the assumption of *Moses*) a Prophecy of *Enoch*, the seventh from *Adam*, and the Book containing this Prophecy was then in being, yet, because there were things in it, which seem'd unworthy of God, & cou'd not be well allegoris'd, the authority of an inspir'd person quoting it as an inspir'd Book, cou'd not support its credit, but it fell into contempt, & was lost.

B. THO' you allow Reason to be the proper Judge in things of morality, as falling under its cognizance; yet as to Prophecies, you must own, we are entirely to rely on authority.

A. I have hitherto said nothing in relation to Prophecies, designing to speak of them at another season; but since you mention them, I must, as to the Prophecies in the Old-Testament, confess my ignorance, that I do not understand them; and Divines themselves, as far as I can find, are infinitely divided about interpreting them: And as to those Prophecies, if they may be so call'd, in the New Testament, relating to the *second coming of Christ*, and the *end of the World*, the best Interpreters and Commentators own, the Apostles themselves were grossly mistaken; there scarce being an Epistle, but where they foretell that those times they wrote in, were *tempora novissima*; & the then Age the last Age, & those days the last days; and that the *end of the World was nigh*, & the *coming of Christ at hand*; as is plain, among other texts, from 1 Cor. 10. 11. Rom. 13. 11, 12. Heb. 9. 26. Jam. 5. 7, 8. 1 Joh. 2. 18. 2 Pet. 3. 12, 13. And they do not assert this as a meer matter of speculation, but build motives & arguments upon it, to excite people to the practice of piety, and all good works; as Phil. 4. 5. *Let your moderation be known to all Men, the Lord is at hand*. And to the same purpose are Heb. 10. 24, 25. 1 Pet. 4. 7, 8. 1 Cor. 7. 29. 2 Pet. 3. 11, 12.

* Jude 9. 14.

And tho' they do not pretend to tell the very day & hour, when these things must happen, yet they thought it wou'd be during their time, & continually expected it. *Time: by* * is charged to keep this Commandment — *till the appearing of the Lord.* So Paul says to the Corinthians, † as oft as ye eat this bread, & drink this cup, ye do strew the Lord's death till he comes. And I think, 'tis plain, Paul himself expected to be alive at the coming of the Lord, & that he had the word of God for it. ‡ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, & remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep: — The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive, & remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. And there are other texts to the same purpose, as 1 Cor. 15. 51, 52. 2 Cor. 5. 4.

B. DOES not St. Paul § suppose, that before the coming of Christ, Antichrist must appear?

A. THAT does not in the least hinder, but he might believe both wou'd happen in his time; For, says he, * the Mystery of iniquity does already work. And St. John puts this matter out of dispute, in saying, † Little Children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

B. DOES not St. Peter say, * There shall come in the last days, Scoffers -- saying where is the promise of his coming?

A. SAINT Peter owns those to be the last days, & the promise of his then coming he confirms, by saying, † God is not slack concerning his promise, the day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the night: — What manner

of

* 1 Tim. 6. 13, 14. † 1 Cor. 11. 26.

‡ 1 Thes. 4. 15, 16, 17, 18. See Grotius in loc.

§ 2 Thes. 2. 3. ¶ Ibid. ver. 7. ✕ 1 John 2. 18.

* 2 Pet. 3. 3, 4. † Ibid. ver. 9. — 13.

of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for, & hasting unto the coming of the day of God; wherein the Heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat: Nevertheless we according to his promise, look for new Heavens, and a new Earth.

B. DOES not St. Peter say, * Beloved be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, & a thousand years as one day?

A. THIS, as in the margin, seems to be quoted from Psalm 90. 4. where 'tis said, A thousand years in thy sight, are but as yesterday when it is past. And surely St. Peter could not imagine, that God affected to speak unintelligibly, & by one day meant a thousand years, and by a thousand years one day; and refer to this place as a proof.

B. DIVINES are at a loss how to account for the Apostles so frequently declaring, the end of all things to be at hand, & Christ to be then a coming; when our Saviour says, † Of that day & hour knoweth no Man; no, not the Angels of Heaven, but my Father only.

A. THOSE Divines would not make these reflections, did they but consider what our Saviour declares to his Disciples, when they came to him privately, saying, ‡ Tell us when these things shall be, & what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world. Does he not in answer to their question, tell them what those signs would be? withal adding, § So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily, I say unto you, This Generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. And to assure them of the truth of what he declares, Heaven & Earth, says he, ¶ shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away. And his adding, ✠ But of that day & hour knoweth no Man; no, not the Angels of Heaven; but my Father only, was not meant

* 2 Pet. 3. 8. † Mat. 24. 36. ‡ Ib. ver. 3.
§ Ver. 33, 34. ¶ Ver. 34. ✠ Ver. 36.

meant to contradict what he just before declar'd, that
** this Generation shall not pass till these things be fulfilled*; but to warn his Disciples not to be surpris'd as the old World was, when the Flood came, and swept them all away: Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord will come: But know this, that if the good Man of the house had known in what watch the Thief would have come, he would have watch'd.

And the Apostles agreeable to this admonition of the Lord, say, † *Yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord cometh as a Thief in the night.* And after the resurrection our Saviour says to Peter, who asks him concerning the beloved Disciple; † *If I will, that he tarry 'till I come. what is that to thee?* And the last thing his Disciples ask'd him on his ascension, is, § *Wilt thou at this time, restore again the Kingdom to Israel?* And the answer he gave them is very consistent with the Kingdom, even the temporal Kingdom of Israel's being restor'd again during their lives. And by our Saviour's saying, when the last supper was ended, § *I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom,* they no doubt, believ'd this happy time was not far off. But,

¶ The most of the Apostles, upon what motives soever, were mistaken in a matter of this consequence, how can we be certain, that any one of them may not be mistaken in any other matter? If they were not inspir'd in what they said in their writings concerning the then coming of Christ, how could they be inspir'd in those arguments they build on a foundation far from being so? And if they thought their times were the last, no direction they gave, could be intended to reach further than their own times. And if John the Evangelist, and John the Divine are the same person, he must believe what is mention'd in the Revelation,

would

* Mat. 24. 34. † 1 Thes. 5. 2. 2 Pet. 3. 10.
 ‡ John 21. 22. § Act. 1. 6. ¶ Mat. 26. 29.

would have happen'd within the compass of that Age in which he writ. But leaving these matters to another time, let us return to the consideration of those duties, which Reason shews us from the nature of God and Man, and the relation Men stand in to him, and one another.

As I have already shown you by a number of instances, where Divines themselves own, that tho' the literal sense of the Scripture be ever so plain, yet it must not stand in competition with what our Reason tells us of the nature & perfections of God; so I shall now shew you, the same in relation to those duties Men owe to one another; and that if Men are not well grounded in the reason & nature of things, and from thence judge of their duty, in relation to one another; there are things either commanded, or approv'd of in the Scripture, which might be apt to lead Men astray. A Man, who looks no further than that, might think it no crime to cheat his elder Brother; impose on his aged Parent, and by a lie obtain his blessing: nay, hope that God would confirm it, when he sees how *Jacob* * obtain'd the greatest blessing from God.

If Men flatter themselves, that they are true *Israelites*, & those of a different Religion, mere *Egyptians*; will they not be apt to imagine, when they see how the *Israelites* spoil'd the *Egyptians* by the command of God himself, who made them borrow what they were not to repay, that this might be a good precedent for them?

B. I must own, that a Command to † *lend, hoping for nothing again*; & a Command to *borrow, without returning any thing again*, seem to be very different Commands.

A. WHEN Men find the Harlot *Rahab* celebrated, even in the *New Testament*, ‡ for lying to the Government,

* *Gen.* 27. † *Luke* 6. 35. *Exod.* 3. 21, 22. - 22. 35, 36.

‡ *Heb.* 11. 31. *Jam.* 2. 25.

ment, and betraying her Country to its most cruel Enemies; are they not in danger, if they find their advantage in it, & 'tis for the service of those they judge to be true *Israelites*, to do the same? since 'tis not pretended the Harlot had any more a special command for so doing, than *Isaiah* had for an act of the highest treachery; for which, because it serv'd the interest of *Israel*, she is declar'd by the Prophets *Deborah* to be *bliss'd above Women*.

WHAT Prince can ever want a pretence of going to War, & totally extirpating those he invades, when he sees, *Saul* † was commanded by God to destroy the *Amalekites*, Men and Women, Infants & Sucklings, Ox & Sheep, Camel & Ass, for an injury done ‡ four hundred years before? And how for sparing *Agag*, § (whom *Samuel* hew'd to pieces before the Lord;) and preserving some of the cattle for sacrifice, the Lord rejected him from being King: † nay, order'd *Samuel*, lest *Saul* shou'd suspect the design, to pretend a Sacrifice, when he sent him to anoint *David*?

WOULD not people, if like the Children of *Israel*, they were destitute of an habitation, be apt to think what the *Israelites* did to the *Canaanites*, a good precedent; and that they might invade a neighbouring, idolatrous Nation, that never did them the least harm; and extirpate not only Men & Women, but even their innocent Infants, in order to get possession of their Country? And I question, whether the *Spaniards* would have murder'd so many millions in the *Indies*, had they not thought they might have us'd them like *Canaanites*.

How many precedents, besides that of *Ehud*, ✕ (who, on a message from the Lord, stabb'd the King to whom his people sent him with a present) did the *Papish* Priests plead from the *Old Testament*, for the assassination of the two *Henries of France*? And had the

* *Judg.* 5. 24. † *1 Sam.* 15. 2, 3. ‡ *Exod.* 17. 8. &c.
§ *1 Sam.* 15. 9. &c. ¶ *Id.* 16. 2. &c. ✕ *Jud.* 3. 15. 20, 21.

the *Gun-Powder-Plot* succeeded here, they wou'd, no doubt, have made use of the same plea to justify it.

Tho' the Lord bids the Jews to pray for the peace of Babylon, * *whither he had caus'd them to be carry'd away captives*; & that in the peace thereof they shou'd have peace; yet is it not said in the *Psalms*, † *O Daughter of Babylon, happy shall he be; who taketh, and dasheth thy little ones against the stones*; and this for no other reason, but because she *desir'd of her Captives one of the songs of Zion*. ‡

THE holier Men in the *Old Testament* are represented; the more cruel they seem to be, as well as more addicted to cursing: How plentifully does David in the 109th *Psalms* bestow the bitterest curses on his Enemies? And how cruelly did he treat the *Ammonites*, when he took their Cities, § *cutting the people with saws, & with barrows of iron, & with axes*?

WHO is not surpris'd to find the holy Prophet *Elisha* cursing, in the name of the Lord, little Children for calling him *bald pate*? And what is still more surprising; ¶ *Two she Bears*, upon his cursing, *strait devour'd forty two little Children*.

AND he likewise entail'd the curse of leprosy on his Man *Gehazy*, & his seed for ever, ✠ for accepting, without his Master's knowledge, a small present from *Naaman*, the *Assyrian*; tho' the Prophet himself afterwards took * *forty Camel loads of the good things of Damascus*, to tell their King the truth, in relation to his recovery; and yet deceiv'd him.

Elijah's causing Fire to come down from Heaven, to destroy two Captains with their Companies, for no other fault, but bluntly delivering a message from the King, & perhaps, in the very words they were commanded; was not so cruel, as his hindering it from † *raining upon the Earth for the space of three years and six*

* Jer. 29. 7. † Psal. 137. 8, 9. ‡ Ibid. ver. 3.
§ 1 Chr. 20. 3. ¶ 2 Kings, 2. 23, 24. ✠ Ib. 5. 27.
* Ibid. 8, 9. &c. † Jam. 5. 17.

six months; since a drought of that continuance, without dew or rain*; in such a barren country as *Judea*, must have, without miracles, destroy'd every thing; and yet St. *James* from hence takes occasion to commend the efficacy of prayer. †

If God will not, in this life, miraculously alter the course of things, for the sake of the innocent, he, certainly, will not do it for the guilty; nor break in upon the ordinary methods & laws of his Providence, to punish one Man for the crime of another, the innocent for the guilty. If God cou'd act thus, it wou'd be no crime in Man to imitate him: nay, how cou'd we be sure, if God deals thus with his Creatures in this life, he will not act so in the life to come? since if the eternal Rules of Justice are once broke, how can we imagine any stop? And yet,

ARE there not examples in Scripture, which, taken in their literal sense, seem to make God break in upon the common course of Nature, & the ordinary rules of his Providence, to punish Men for crimes they were not guilty of; as God's causing, in the latter end of *David's* Reign, ‡ a Famine for three years together, for the crime of *Saul* and his bloody House, in slaying the Gibeonites: And that God smote *Israel*, & destroy'd seventy thousand of them for *David's* fault, in causing the innocent sleep, as he justly calls them, to be number'd.

B. I believe there must be some mistake in this last story; for is it not fit for several important reasons, that Kings shou'd know the numbers of their People? Are they not the strength & riches of their Kingdom? And was not the People of *Israel*, by being frequently number'd, & sometimes by God's own appointment, a good precedent for *David*? But passing that by, how can we reconcile this story with itself? § In one place 'tis said, God mov'd *David* to number *Israel*; ¶

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* 1 Kings 17. 1. † Jam. 5. 17.
‡ 2 Sam. 21. 1. § 1b. 24. 1. ¶ 1 Chr. 21. 1.

in another *Satan* provok'd David. Did God conspire with Satan in this act, in order to destroy a number of innocent persons? But do these two places any more agree in the account *Joab* gives in of the number of the People? * nay, if in the beginning of *Saul's* Reigh, the numbers were rightly calculated, 'tis morally impossible, to say nothing of the destruction made by continual War, that either account shou'd be true. Besides,

CAN God change his mind, & that suddenly too? Yet 'tis said, *God sent an Angel to Jerusalem to destroy it*; and as he was destroying it, *the Lord beheld, and repented him of the evil*. And can any one think this to be a meer Pestilence, when a real Angel is said to be miraculously sent to execute God's anger? † And David, *with the Elders of Israel, fell on their faces, & saw the Angel of the Lord stand between the Earth and the Heavens, having a drawn sword in his hand, by the threshing-floor of Ornan, the Jebusite*; & is there commanded to build an Altar.

A. WHAT you say may be true, since there are several mistakes crept into the Old Testament, where there's scarce a chapter, which gives any historical account of matters, but there are some things in it, which cou'd not be there originally; ‡ and even in this Book of *Chronicles*, there are things mention'd, too late to be inserted by *Ezra*, or *Nehemiah*. And I might add, that the *Jewish* History being for the most part taken from larger accounts, 'tis no wonder its abstracts are not always very exact.

I cou'd give you many more instances of this nature, but I am afraid some will think these too many; tho' I have said nothing, but what Archbishop *Tillotson* does in effect, in affirming, § „ The difference between the Style of the Old and New Testament is

* 1 Sam. 11. 8. † 1 Chr. 21. 15, 16. 18.

‡ See *Prideaux's* Connect. Part 1. B. 5. p. 343. & B. 8. p. 574. § *Serm.* Vol. 2. p. 185.

„ so very remarkable, that one of the greatest Sects
 „ in the primitive times did upon this very ground,
 „ found their Heresy of *Two Gods*: The one evil,
 „ fierce, and cruel, whom they call'd *The God of the*
 „ *Old Testament*; the other good, kind, & merciful,
 „ whom they call'd *The God of the New Testament*:
 „ So great a difference is there between the represen-
 „ tations, which are made of God in the books of
 „ the *Jewish & Christian Religion*, as to give, at least,
 „ some colour, and pretence for an imagination of
 „ two Gods., But,

It must be own'd, that the same Spirit (I dare not
 call it a spirit of cruelty) does not alike prevail
 throughout the Old Testament; the nearer we come
 to the times of the Gospel, the milder it appear'd;
 for tho' God declares in the Decalogue, that he is a
Jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the Parents upon
their Children, to the third and fourth generation; and
 accordingly *Achan*,* with all his Family, was destroy'd
 for his single crime; yet the Lord afterwards says,
 † *The Soul that sinneth, it shall dye; the Son shall not*
bear the iniquity of the Father, &c.

Our Saviour, by saying, *He came not to destroy*
Mens lives, but to save them; condemns their taking
 away the lives of any, except in defence of their own,
 & of what is necessary for their support; and this he
 declares, upon a most remarkable occasion: Some of
 his Disciples, upon his not being receiv'd into a Sa-
 maritan Village, ‡ *because his face was towards Jeru-*
salem, straight cry'd, Wilt thou we command fire from
Heaven, and consume them; as Elias did? § *He rebuk'd*
them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye
are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy Mens
Lives, but to save them. If any precedent might have
 been pleaded from the Old Testament, it wou'd, no
 doubt, have been that of *Elias*, the Fore-runner of
 our

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* Josh. 7. 24.

† Ezek. 18. 20.

‡ Luke 9. 54.

§ Ibid. ver. 55, 56.

our Saviour; who came from Heaven (to which he went up by a Whirlwind in a *Chariot of fire*, with *Horses of fire**) to meet our Saviour on a *high mountain*.†

AND if it be contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, even to with to imitate that great Prophet so favour'd of God; the same will hold as strongly, in relation to all the actions that are of a like nature of other holy men, tho' quoted with approbation in the New Testament; as *Moses* is for acting the part of a Magistrate, ‡ when a private Man, in destroying his fellow Subject. And if there's a contrast between the spirit of the Old, & the spirit of the New Testament, ought not we *Christians* to stick to the latter; & not suppose the texts, which require doing good even to the *Gentiles*, & dealing with them as ourselves expect to be dealt with, to relate to *Christians* only before they had power to act otherwise; & that after they were to be govern'd by precedents from the Old Testament?

B. ARE there any so absurd, as to endeavour thus to reconcile the Old & New Testament?

A. WE find the Orthodox, as soon as they had a Prince, who refus'd submission to their decisions in the Council of Nice, in express terms own'd as much.

Lucifer Calaritanus, then a most orthodox Bishop, in several discourses address'd to the Son of *Constantine* the Great, does not scruple to tell the Emperor himself, that it was the duty of the Orthodox to kill him, on the account of his *Arianism*; which he calls *Idolatry*: And for this he quotes *Deut.* 13. 6. & *1 Maccab.* 1. 43. to ver. 29th of Chap. 2. and then insultingly says, §
„ If you had been in the hands of *Matthias*, or *Phineas*, they

* *2 Kings* 2. 11. † *Mark* 9. 2. 4. ‡ *Acts* 7. 24.

§ See *S. Johnson's Answer to Hick's Constant*, where the Story is at large, p. 56. *See & Val.* p. 5, 76, 77. taken out of *Biblioth. vet. Patr. To. 4 Colen.* pag. 164. *See*

„ they would have kill'd you. You say you suffer
 „ despiteful usage from us, contrary to the admoni-
 „ tions of holy Scripture. -- If ever any one of the
 „ worshippers of God spared Apostates, let what you
 „ say of us be true. -- Pray shew me but one of them,
 „ that ever spar'd the Adversaries of his Religion: „
 „ And the texts for obedience to Magistrates from
 „ *Titus* 3. 1. he evades, by saying, „ That the Apostle
 „ spoke of those Princes & Magistrates, who as yet
 „ had not believed in the only Son of God; that they
 „ by our humility, and meekness, & suffering long
 „ under adversity, & all possible obedience in things
 „ fitting, might be won over to Christianity.

Athanasius, & the Confessors that were with him
 highly applauded *Lucifer's* discourses, and says, „ We
 „ plainly see the picture of an Apostle, the boldness
 „ of a Prophet, the magistry of truth, the doctrine
 „ of true Faith. -- You seem to be the true Temple
 „ of our Saviour, who dwelling in you, speaks these
 „ things by you. --

„ BELIEVE me, *Lucifer*, You alone did not say
 „ these things, but the Holy Ghost with you; how
 „ came you to remember Scripture at that rate?
 „ how came you to understand the sense & meaning
 „ of it so perfectly, if the Holy Ghost had not assisted
 „ you in it?

THEY, who design a new Religion, in opposition
 to establish'd ones, would, no doubt, as these Fathers
 suppose, begin with Precepts of the greatest humanity
 & tenderness, & doing the utmost good to Mankind,
 tho' of ever so different persuasions; but to think, as
 these Fathers then did, (and the Orthodox, if we
 judge from their actions, have ever since thought)
 that all the Precepts of the Gospel of this nature were
 design'd only to draw *Jews* & *Gentiles* into the Church,
 as Gallants gain their Mistresses by obsequiousness, &
 that after they were once in, the Church (as all Sects
 and parties term themselves) had a right to murder,

not only private persons, but even their Sovereigns, for not holding the orthodox Faith; and that this is the only way to reconcile the Old & New Testament, is a notion highly injurious to the Christian Religion.

'Tis, no doubt, the interest of wicked Priests, to have God represented under opposite characters; and to give in one Testament Rules contrary to those in the other: that they, as it serves their turn, may make use of either: But is it not astonishing for Saints and Confessors upon the first occasion, to renounce their former principles, and in defiance of their oaths of Allegiance, represent a Man *inspir'd by the Holy Ghost*, & say, that *Christ spoke in him*, when he declares it the duty of Christians to murder an heretical Emperor?

B. THOSE holy Fathers, I suppose, thought, they saw things of the greatest consequence, tho' commanded in the Old, forbidden in the New Testament; and that to make the Old & New Testament to contradict each other in these things, was to destroy the authority of both; and therefore concluded, this expedient was the only way to support both.

A. BY reasoning thus, instead of reconciling both, they destroy'd both, & natural Religion too; in supposing Things are not good and evil in themselves, but that all depends on the Will of an arbitrary Being, which might endlessly change. But,

IF there's a Law of Nature, with the observing of which God can't dispense either in himself, or in his Creatures; * & no Religion can be true, that in the minutest circumstances is contrary to it's Righteousness; and the Gospel inculcates all such Precepts of Natural Religion, as require doing good to *Jew and Gentile*, even the same we expect from them: and that we are indispensably bound to allow all others the same right of judging for themselves, as we claim for ourselves.

* See *Pringle's* Lett. to the *Drafts*, pag. 127. Edit. 7. 8vo.

selves; must we not, if we will support the credit of the Old Testament, suppose it to contain nothing inconsistent with this natural right confirm'd by the Gospel? If this be not so, pray shew me my mistake: but if it be just reasoning; tel me how you can account for the conduct of the *Jews*, in invading, and that too without any Declaration of War, the *Canaanites*, a free and independant Nation, and against whom they had not the least cause of complaint, and on pretence of their being idolaters, destroying not only the Men & Women, but Infants incapable of idolatry, or any other crime. This, you know, has given great advantage to the Enemies of our Religion, who represent the whole proceeding, as an unparallel'd piece of injustice & cruelty, & therefore, I should be glad to know what our Divines, if they do not interpret this fact allegorically, or as only done in vision, say, to shew 'tis not contrary to the Law of Nature, & those Precepts of the Gospel which are founded on it.

B. I wonder you can be ignorant, with what ease our Divines solve this seeming difficulty, by having recourse to a positive Command for treating the *Canaanites* as they did.

A. SUCH a Command is pleaded in vain, except it can be shewn, that the thing suppos'd to be commanded, is not inconsistent with the Law of Nature; which if God can dispense with in any one case, he may in all, nor cou'd his Wisdom then prescribe any certain Rule of conduct, either for himself or his Creatures, but all wou'd depend on an uncertain, fluctuating, arbitrary Will.

B. MAY not a thing, which is unlawful for Men to do of themselves, become lawful, by the Command of the supreme Being?

A. SUPPOSE any shou'd now plead that they had a divine Commission to destroy their next Neighbours, whom they judg'd to be Idolaters, Man, Woman &

Child, in order to possess their country, wou'd not our Divines say, no Man cou'd be as certain he had any such positive Command from God, as he was, that God had forbid it him by the Light of Nature? Nor cou'd miracles be a proof of any such Commission; since we can only know from the nature of the things themselves; whether Miracles are done by a good, or evil Being; and we are to compare what we are told of God, with what we know of him; otherwise we believe in Men, & not in God. And if the Light of Nature, (the voice of God himself) teaches us, even to demonstration, that God is infinitely wise and good, does it not likewise demonstrate, that no Command, not stamp'd with these characters, can come from him, much less a Command inconsistent with all those duties that Men as Men owe to one another?

B. MAY not God punish some wicked Nations with death, to fright others from committing the same crimes?

A. GOD has a thousand ways of doing this, without commanding Men to do any thing, which, by the Law of Nature, he had forbid them; and if God design'd what he did to be a terror to others, wou'd he not act after such a signal, & super-natural manner, as all shou'd see it was his own doing; and the reason of his so doing: And in order to it, distinguish between the guilty, & the innocent?

IF God wou'd punish the *Canaanites*, for acting contrary to the Law of Nature, wou'd he, in order to do this, require the *Israelites* to act contrary to the same Law, in murdering Men, Women, & Children, that never did them the least injury?

BESIDES, were not the *Jews*, considering their circumstances upon their coming out of *Egypt*, the most improper People to convince the world, that they did not act out of a private interest, but purely to execute God's vengeance on an idolatrous Nation?

Wou'd

Would God, in such a case, choose People as prone to Idolatry as the *Canaanites* themselves? Some question, whether, in this case, the plea of a divine Command, if taken literally, will not destroy all the internal proofs of the falsehood of any Religion; for can that, *say they*, which is consistent with the truth of any one true Religion, prove another Religion to be false? And do not all our Divines, when they are speaking against other Religions, maintain, that their commanding, or approving any thing contrary to the Law of Nature, is a demonstration of their falsehood? since it destroys all the internal proofs of the truth of any Religion, & confounds all the essential marks, by which we discern good from evil; and supposes God may command a Son to sacrifice his Father, or do any thing, tho' ever so repugnant to the Light of Nature.

R. THESE Men carry their reasoning too far; for has not Providence frequently made use of ill Men, not only to punish ill Men, but for other good purposes?

A. IN the course of things it can't but happen, that some ill Men may be a scourge to others; yet that can't excuse them, if in so doing they act against the eternal Rules of Justice & Equity. Tho' a thing may be said to be done by the determinate Council of God, yet that will not justify, or excuse those that did it, if not consistent with the Law of Nature. St. Peter, speaking of the holy Child Jesus, says, * — *The People of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand, & thy Counsel determined before to be done: And yet were not they, & their Posterity punish'd for that fact, which God's hand & Counsel had determin'd shou'd be done? Besides,*

If the israelites had a divine Commission to extirpate the Canaanites, ought not the Canaanites to have known it, to prevent their resisting Men acting by a

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divine

* Acts 4. 27, 28.

divine Commission? Otherwise would there not be two opposite rights at the same time; a right in the Jews by revelation, to take away the lives of the Canaanites, & a right in the Canaanites by the Law of Nature, to defend their lives?

B. WAS not the * *Sun's standing still for a whole day together*, at the command of *Joshua*, that he might have light enough to destroy his enemies, a sufficient proof they ought to have offer'd up their throats?

A. THAT did not happen till they were defeated before *Gibron*, and consequently till then, it could be no direction to them, and even after that, † *the Lord harden'd their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle*; and tho' 'tis said, ‡ *that the living God is among you*, and that *he will not fail to drive out before you the Canaanites, &c.* yet *Israel* could not drive them out of several places: And in one instance 'tis said, § *The Lord was with Judah, & he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.*

A Reverend Author, to solve the difficulties attending this matter, says, ¶ „*The Criticks & Rabbins* „ take notice, that it is not said by the Historian, „ that *Joshua* commanded the *Sun & Moon* to stand „ still; but he recites the words of a certain book „ (supposed to be a *Poem*, written by one *Jafier*) „ in which the Poet, because of the great and long „ slaughter, that *Joshua* made of the *Ammorites*, in- „ troduces *Joshua*, as requiring the *Sun & Moon* to „ stand still, while he, and his Army destroy'd the „ Enemies of the Lord. Which, indeed, was an „ elegant fiction, & very proper in a *Poem* that was „ written on such an occasion.

AND

* *Josb.* 10. 12, 13. † *Ibid.* cap. 11. 20.

‡ *Ibid.* cap. 3. 10. - 16. 10. - 17. 12. § *Judges* 1. 19.

¶ *Nyc of Nat. and Rev. Relig.* pag. 202.

AND now let me ask you, Whether the very endeavouring to reconcile this, or any other facts mention'd in the Old Testament, with the Light of Nature & the Evangelical Precepts, is not a plain confession what Men ought to think of them, if they could not be reconcil'd; and that we are to use our Reason, in judging of the actions of the most celebrated persons of old? Else, to give no other instances, than the Transactions between *Judah & Tamar*, we might approve her stratagem, in getting to lye with her Father-in-law; for tho' before he knew himself to be the Man, he was resolv'd to burn her; yet after he cry'd, * *She has been more righteous than I*: And for this righteousness she was bless'd with twins, from whom the noble house of *Judah*, with all its Kings, & the *Messiah* himself, was descended.

I think, I could not say less than I have, in vindication of the Precepts of the Gospel; by shewing that they were not design'd merely to draw People into the profession of the Christian Religion, and then to be laid aside, except where they serv'd the interest of the local orthodoxy; but that they are Rules in their own nature obligatory, which, from their internal excellency, always bound Mankind; & consequently, all Men, even those of the meanest abilities, must have been capable of knowing them, and out of danger, were it not their own fault, of being misled by any precedents whatever.

If what has been already said, may not be sufficient to shew, that it can't be imputed to want of Wisdom, or Goodness in God, or to any defect in Reason, which he has at all times given Mankind for the discovery of his Will, that the nature of Religion is so little understood, and so many things, which do not shew themselves to be the Will of God, are mix'd with it; let me ask you, whether God has a greater kindness for the brute, than the rational creation?

B.

* *Gen. 38. 27.*

B. THAT, certainly, must be a needless question.

A. IF God, then, in the very frame & make of those Animals we term irrational, has implanted the sense of every thing necessary to answer the end of their creation, can we imagine, he has not as great a care of his Creatures endow'd with Reason, & made after his own image, and for ends infinitely more noble than the brute creation? When we see with what skill & contrivance, Birds, without being taught by any, but the God of Nature, build their nests; and how artfully the Spiders frame their webs, the Bees their little cels, and the Beasts avoid all noxious herbs: And not to multiply instances, how all Animals are endow'd with sufficient sagacity, for preserving themselves & species; must we not own, that what we call *Instinct*, is a certain & infallible Guide for inferior Animals? and can we doubt, whether Man, the Lord of the Creation, has not from his superior Reason, sufficient notices of whatever makes for his greatest, his eternal happiness?

IF we can't charge God with acting thus partially, must we not be oblig'd to own, that Reason is as certain a Guide for *rational* Creatures, as *Instinct* is for irrational? And consequently, that those Men are below Brutes, who, wanting *Instinct*, will not govern themselves, nor suffer others to be govern'd by Reason? And

THO' they place the highest value on themselves for being rational, & by virtue of it religious, yet are they ever contriving how to hinder the free exercise of Reason in religious matters; as if Reason & Religion were irreconcilable, and that the method God proposes for the discovery of all other truth, was a most certain way to confound religious truth, and endlessly to multiply error. But,

THO' Divines in all Ages have, for the most part, shewn themselves mortal enemies to the true exercise of Reason, yet now, God be thank'd, there are those among them, who dare do it justice. THAT

THAT eminent Divine, Mr. S. Nye, tho' writing in defence of Revelation, says, * „Tis obvious to every one, that Natural Religion intimates to us, & comprises *the whole* duty, that we owe to God, or Men: Whatever is to be believ'd, or done by us, is declar'd & comprehended in Natural Religion; God has instructed all Men every where, in the whole of their duty, by a connate Light, even by the talent of Reason common to all. And,

THE judicious Mr. Butler says, † „ That nothing can be more evident, than that exclusive of Revelation, Mankind can't be consider'd as a Creature left by his Maker to act at random - - but from his make, constitution, or nature, he is in the strictest & proper sense a Law to himself. There are as real, and the same kind of indications in human-nature, that we were made for society, and to do good to our fellow-creatures, as that we were intended to take care of our life, health, & private good.

B. If what you, and these reverend Authors say, be true, the Principles, on which all Religion is founded must be so obvious, that all Men, even of the meanest capacity, may from thence discern their duty both to God & Man.

A. You shall confess there are such Principles, by my asking you a question, or two: Is not the foundation of all Religion, the believing there's only one self-existent Being, to whom all others owe their being, & their continuance in being? And is it not as certain, as there is such a Being, that he did not create Mankind to supply any wants of his own; or give them rules for their conduct, but to oblige them to act for their common good? If then an action is for their good, is not that alone an infallible test of its being approv'd by God? And if it tends to their hurt,

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Mr. Nye of Nat. and Rev. Relig. p. 95.

† *Strin. preach. at the Rolls, p. 47. & p. 50.*

is not that as certain a mark of its being disapprov'd by him? But if it tends to neither, does not that sufficiently show it to be neither approv'd, nor disapprov'd? Since it is as inconsistent with the goodness of God, to punish Men for not doing an indifferent thing, as it is with his wisdom, to reward them for doing it.

B. Tho' all rational Creatures, who, to their utmost, imitate their great Creator and Benefactor, in communicating happiness to each other; do all that God requires of them; yet 'tis on supposition, that they do not judge wrong in relation to their common good?

A. If Men, according to the best of their understanding, act for their common good, they then govern themselves by the same rule God governs them; their will is the same with his, & they concur in the same design with him; and should they, in some nice & difficult cases, mistake in applying the rule, yet in being intirely govern'd by it, they have done all that God requires; who, having made Men fallible, will not impute to them want of infallibility: And the best way not to mistake, in applying this rule, is to consider duly all circumstances, & follow what upon the whole seems best. As this is the rule both of God & Man, so is it in common to the unlearned as well as learned; for have not all alike faculties given them by God, to distinguish between good & evil, right & wrong, and to know, that, as they wou'd not suffer wrong themselves, so they ought not to do wrong?

B. THE common people may have sufficient abilities to know their duty to Man, but can they as well know what they owe to God?

A. In what point is it, that Men of the meanest abilities may not know their duty, whether it relates to God, or Man? As to the first, can't they tell what sentiments inspire them with love and reverence for the Deity? And need they much reflection to know, that

that the more any sentiments do this, the more they ought to be cherish'd? And that every notion, which tends not to raise in them the highest conceptions of the divine Being, is derogatory to his perfection; and that the highest honour and worship they can render him, is solemnly to own him to be what he is? And that as they ought themselves to have the highest ideas of love & veneration for their Creator & Benefactor, so they should on all proper occasions endeavour to excite the same in others? And that as they cannot but see, it would be in them affronting God, to offer him a worship, which they believe he abhors, so they must think it the same in others?

As to their duty to one another, can't they perceive, that 'tis fit in the nature of things, & agreeable to the mind of their Creator, (who has endow'd them with Reason for this end) to introduce into his creation as much happiness as they can, by being ready to assist, and prevent one another in all good offices? And indeed, the reciprocal duties are so very evident, that even children are sensible of doing as they would be done unto; and the mind, with the same ease, sees the agreeableness or disagreeableness of moral & immoral actions, as the eye discovers agreeableness, or disagreeableness in outward objects. And,

THE meaner people are, & the lower their station, the fewer are the things their duty consists in; & those so very plain, that they cannot well mistake, with relation either to God, or Man; were they not impos'd on by artful Men, who, in all ages and places, have mix'd with pure Religion, things tending, indeed, to their own honour, & their own good, but far from being consistent with the honour of God, & the good of Man; and then pretended they were necessary to influence the common people, who would not be satisfy'd with plain, simple truths: And from this source have issu'd out most of those absurdities, which, to the scandal of human-nature, have over-run Mankind;

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and which, for the most part, were too subtle, & metaphysical for the common people, if left to themselves, ever to have thought of; much less to have rais'd commotions about them: They, it must be own'd; peace and quiet being their interest, are naturally good Subjects & good Neighbours, and upon all accounts most useful members of the community; except when their Priests, on pretence of the good of the Church, work them up to tumults, mutiny, sedition, & rebellion; because their Governours presume, without their leave, to give equal protection to all their Subjects, notwithstanding their different opinions. And if we consult Ecclesiastical History, we shall find the worst of Princes, have been most sure of their assistance, even in carrying on the vilest designs, provided the Church found their interest in so doing; and the best, of their opposition, when they design'd the interest of pure Religion, free from Priestcraft & Superstition. And the Laity, certainly, can't be too much on their guard, when they find extraordinary favours, (such as these in a former Reign,) are design'd for the Clergy.

I do not wholly confine this remark to the Priests of any one Religion, since by the influence they have on the multitude, they have at all times done sufficient mischiefs. Hence *Grotius* says, * „ That, as „ Curiously observ'd of old, the Multitude, ensnar'd by „ Superstition, are more apt to be govern'd by their „ Priests than Princes: and that the Kings and Emperors have learnt this at their cost, insomuch that „ to produce examples of this kind, wou'd in a manner, be transcribing the History of all Nations.

THEY, I think, wou'd do no small service to Mankind, who wou'd improve this hint of *Grotius*, and shew how the Priests in all Religions, and in all times, have impos'd on the credulity of the People;

nor
* *Grotius de Imper. summ. Potest. circa sacra. c. 1. Sect. 13.*

nor could it but be very acceptable to a Clergy, who abhor all such vile methods.

B. You all along argue, that the Rule of action, in order to human happiness, being every where the same, as founded on the nature of God and Man, and the relation we stand in to him, & one another, true Religion, in all places & times, must ever be the same; eternal, universal, & unalterable; and such as every intelligent Creature, must have sufficient understanding to discover, & abilities to comply with; except we suppose a Being perfectly wise, & infinitely good, requires of his Creatures, things which he has not enabl'd them to know, or perform: And hence you conclude, that external Revelation can only be a republication of this unchangeable rule of life. But Divines, you are sensible, for the most part, are of a different sentiment, nay, highly complain of the imperfection & insufficiency of this Rule.

A. IN order to shew the absurdity of such complaints, let me ask you, had Mankind, before any traditional Religion commenc'd, any Religion, or not?

B. IT must be own'd, that they had a Religion, which, as coming from the Author of all perfection, must, as worthy of its divine original, be wholly perfect; nor could there be a greater mark of its perfection, than that of its being universal, unchangeable, & indelibly implanted in human-nature.

A. I will not ask you, whether any Religion, that wants those marks of perfection, can come from a Being of infinite perfection, but desire to know wherein the perfection of this universal, & unchangeable Religion consists?

B. IT can't be deny'd, that the end for which God implanted this Religion in human-nature, was to make Men happy here as well as hereafter; (God's will in relation to Man & human happiness being equivalent terms) & therefore, he could not, at any time, leave them destitute of the most proper means to answer this end.

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A. DOES not the undeniable perfection of this universal Religion, sufficiently expose all your pretences to a new Religion, giv'n by God to any small part of Mankind in these last Ages?

B. WE say, there was need of a new Religion, tho' the old was ever so perfect, because Men did not observe it.

A. IF that was a reason for a new Religion, we might expect new Religions daily, * „ But, as the „ *present Bishop of Bangor observes*, tho' the World was „ the worse for abusing the Religion of Nature, and „ might want to be reform'd by a divine Instructor, „ yet the Religion of Nature was not the worse for „ being abus'd, but still retain'd its first purity and „ simplicity; „ and consequently, its native efficacy to make us happy: But Men not paying a due regard to this most perfect Religion, but mixing with it human inventions, it might, then, be agreeable to the divine goodness, to send persons to recal them to a more strict observation of it; which, had it been observ'd, must have destroy'd all contentions, but of outvying one another in all good offices, as the corrupting it has done the contrary.

WHICH *Hypothesis*, think you, is most for the honour of God, & the good of Man; (those certain tests by which we are to judge of the truth of all matters relating to Religion;) that all God's Laws shou'd carry with them such evident marks of goodness and kindness for the whole race of Mankind, as that Men of the meanest capacities, even tho' they can't read in their own native language, may know their duty? Or that their Religion, & the proofs on which it depends, shou'd be originally writ in languages they understand not, which, by putting all traditional Religions on a level, obliges them in every Country, to

* *Sherlock's Sermon for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts. pag. 14.*

to pin their faith on Men, who are but too apt to abuse the peoples credulity to their own profit?

B. THERE can be no doubt, but 'tis for the honour of God, & the good of Man, that all his Laws shou'd have such a signature impress'd on them, as may shew his infinite wisdom & goodness: but can you say, all his Laws bear this character?

A. YES, if they are all of a piece: And since God had no other end in creating Mankind, but their good; or in giving them Laws, but as they conduce to that good, and has given, and requires 'em to use their understanding to distinguish between good and evil, Men, in doing all the good they can, whether they know any thing of the institutions, which prevail in this, or that Age or Country, or not, fully answer the end of their creation, & do in the best manner recommend themselves to the favour both of God & Man.

WITHOUT the common people are govern'd by those plain, obvious principles I contend for, they would always be in a state of uncertainty; since as Bishop Taylor justly observes, & all History confirms,

„ * There's no Church that is in prosperity, but alters
„ her Doctrine every Age, either by bringing in new
„ Doctrines, or by contradicting her old, which shews
„ they are not satisfy'd with themselves, nor with their
„ own Confessions. „ 1 „ Let none of the Heathen,
„ says an antient Church-Historian, deride us, because
„ the latter Bishops depose the former, & always find
„ out something which they add to the Faith.

B. Is there nothing in *Theology*, but what Divines have alter'd?

A. MR. Le Clerc observes, that $\frac{1}{2}$ „ Theology is
„ subject to revolutions as well as Empires: but tho'
„ it has undergone considerable changes, yet the honour
„ of Divines is much the same.

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„ * *Dedication to Liberty of Prophecy.* pag. 32.

„ † *Evag. Eccles. Hist. l. 1. c. 11. p. 267. B.*

„ ‡ *Life of Nazianzen* pag. 28. Eng. Transl.

WHATEVER noise *Ecclesiasticks* make about Creeds, or other fundamentals, there's very often something else at the bottom; as whoever is conversant in Church History must know: However to give one instance,

„ * When the *Eastern & Western* Churches in the 9th Century, fell into an humour of quarreling upon „ the account of Jurisdiction, after some time of „ anger, in which they seem'd to be searching for „ matter to reproach one another with, they found „ out this difference. The *Greeks* reproach'd the *Latins*, for adding to the Faith about the procession of „ the Holy Ghost, & corrupting the ancient Symbol, „ and that too contrary to the Decree of a General „ Council. The *Latins* on the other hand, charg'd „ them for detracting from the dignity of the *Son*. „ And this became the chief point in controversy „ between them., I can't but mention Bishop *Burnet's* remark on this dispute, † „ We of this Church, „ says he, „ tho' we abhor the cruelty of condemning „ the *Eastern* Churches for such a difference, yet do „ receive the Creed according to the usage of the „ *Western* Churches., Which is in effect, receiving that Creed, which damns the *Eastern* Churches.

AND it's plain from Church History, that *Creeds* were the spiritual arms, with which contending parties combated each other; and that those who were the majority invented such unscriptural terms, as they thought their adversaries wou'd most scruple, in order to the stripping them of their preferments; and it wou'd have been well if they had stuck there, & not made use of more cruel methods.

NONE, who consider how differently the circumstances of human affairs, which are continually changing, affect Men, but must see 'tis scarce possible, that the Doctrines which were originally taught, or the practice originally us'd in any institution, shou'd long continue the same; nothing being more easy than

* *Expos. of 39. Art. p. 70. Art. 5.* † *Ibid.*

than to vary the signification of words. The infinite divisions which prevail'd, even in the primitive and apostolical times, sufficiently prove this; without having recourse to those alterations & additions, which the Clergy have since been continually making in Christianity; especially in the *Greek & Latin Churches*. But we need go no further back than the *Reformation*; did not the whole body of the people, Laity as well as Clergy, in the compass of twelve years, change their Religion three times? And it would make no small book, to shew how since that time, our Clergy, tho' their *Calvinistical Articles* continue the same, have vary'd, both as to *Doctrines & Discipline*. What a quick change have we seen of those passive principles, once the characteristick of the Church? And if we judge by the present disputes now on foot, the Clergy are not like to be more fix'd for the future. But of all Clergy-men, they, certainly, are not upon any account to be rely'd on, who, tho' by their whole conduct they shew their great zeal for Persecution, yet talk against an implicit Faith, and recommend *Christianity as requiring no further favour, than a fair, and impartial inquiry into its grounds and doctrines*. This not only shews their great hypocrisy, but that they are more cruel than those, who expressly forbid all examination; since they first tempt Men to examine, & then punish them for so doing, if they presume to differ from their leaders; & those that forbid all examination can do no more. And herein they act the part of Satan, first tempt people, & then punish them for being tempted; so that, strictly speaking, 'tis not always true, that Priests of all Religions are the same; such hypocritical, persecuting Priests are worse than all others; who, while they charge the *Papist*, or *Mahometan*, with a consciousness of his Religion's being a cheat, because he will not permit it to be examin'd; not only practise the same themselves, but contend 'tis necessary for the support of the true Religion.

How easily the sense of words may be mistaken, the Apolles themselves are a sufficient instance, for had they the same ideas of the words which Jesus spake, as Jesus himself had, 'tis impossible that after three years converse they shou'd be ignorant of the end of his Mission: And if his familiar Friends, who daily convers'd with him in the same language, and had every minute an opportunity of being satisfy'd of their doubts, cou'd yet so grossly mistake; well may we at this distance of time, if we are to be govern'd by words, & not by the unalterable Reason of things: And how long was it, till they understood the meaning of *Teach all Nations, Preach the Gospel to every Creature*? And St. Peter himself needed a Miracle to open his understanding, to comprehend a most evident truth. * *Then Peter opened his Mouth, & said, Of a Truth, I perceive that God is no Respector of Persons: But in every Nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* Till this happen'd, he, tho' fill'd with the Holy Ghost, confin'd Salvation to the name of a person, viz. the Name of Christ. † *There is none other Name under Heaven given amongst Men, whereby we must be saved.*

HAD there been but one language, and a Book writ in that language, in indelible characters, (so that there cou'd be none of those thirty thousand various readings, which are own'd to be crept into the New-Testament) and all cou'd have access to it; yet even then, considering how uncertain the meaning of words are, and the interest of designing Men, to put a wrong sense on them, it must be morally impossible this Religion cou'd long continue the same. And,

„ If, as St. Jerom says, ‡ a false interpretation of „ the Gospel of Christ, may make it become the „ Gospel of Men, nay, which is worse, of Devils; „ how can they, who, not understanding the original, must

* Acts 10. 34, 35. † 12. 4. 14. ‡ On Galat. 1.

must trust to the interpretation of others, be certain; had they not a sufficient inward Light to direct them, what Doctrines are from God, what from Men, and what from Devils?

Is it not notorious, that Popish Priests, not to mention other persecuting Priests, have propagated such destructive notions, as if the Devil himself had been to contrive a Religion, he could not have invented more pernicious?

WORDS are the arbitrary marks of Mens ideas, & the meaning of words, as well as the words themselves, are perpetually changing, & 'tis as impossible to fix one as the other. We see by the innumerable verbal disputes, which happen even among learned Men, how different their ideas are; and perhaps, there are not three persons, who, when they talk abstractedly, have precisely the same ideas, tho' they use the same words. No one can doubt of this, who considers how much the Divines of the same Church differ in explaining what they mean by *Divine Person*, *Essence*, *Trinity*, *Messiah*, *Incarnation*, *Hypostatical Union*, *Original Sin*, *Satisfaction*, *Justification*, *Predellination*, *Grace*, *Free-will*, & all other technical terms, if I may so call them. Bishop Taylor quotes *Osiander* for saying,

„ * There are twenty several opinions concerning
„ *Justification*, all drawn from the Scriptures by the
„ Men only of the *Augustine* Confession; & there are
„ sixteen several opinions concerning *Original Sin*;
„ & as many distinctions of the *Sacraments* as there
„ are Sects of Men that disagree about them.

THAT excellent Critick *Daillé* says, † „ We have,
„ indeed, these words *Pope*, *Patriarch*, *Mafs*, *Oblation*,
„ *Station*, *Procession*, *Morial Sins*, *Penance*, *Confession*,
„ *Satisfaction*, *Merit*, *Indulgence*, as the Ancients had,
„ and make use of an infinite number of the like
„ terms; but understand them in a sense almost as

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* *Polem. Disc.* pag. 452.

† *Daillé de Usu Patrum*. l. 1. c. 5. p. 149.

„ far different from theirs, as our Age is remov'd
„ from theirs.

To give one remarkable instance of this nature; the primitive Fathers did not believe a Spirit to be immaterial, but only a thinner sort of body: And this they did not only apply to the Souls of Men & Angels, (who, they suppos'd, lay with Women, & got Children in abundance;) but they thought that God himself was corporeal. * *Melito*, who was believ'd to be a Prophet, & flourish'd about 170, wrote a book about the *imbodyed God*. And *Tertullian* says, † *Quis negabit Deum corpus esse, etsi Deus Spiritus est?* And again, *Nihil incorporale nisi quod non est*. And *St. Hilary*, even in the fourth Century affirms, ‡ *There's nothing but what is corporeal*. And 'tis very probable, that from some words of our Saviour, they thought that a Spirit was a thinner sort of Body, that cou'd be seen, but not felt. And from *St. Paul's* saying, § *In this dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily*, and talking in several other places of a *spiritual body*, they concluded that that was the same with a *bodily Spirit*; tho' our Divines now very well know how to distinguish between a *bodily Spirit* & a *spiritual Body*.

In short, there are scarce any words in any one language, except of such things as immediately strike the senses, that are adequately answer'd in another, so as exactly to comprehend the same ideas; and if the ideas are only fewer, or more, what confusion may not that occasion? How great, & frequent must the mistakes then be, in translating the antiquated languages of people, who liv'd at a vast distance of time, as well as in countries far remote; & affected hyperbolical, parabolical, mystical, allegorical, & typical ways of expressing themselves, as opposite to the

usage

* *Corell. Not. ad Script. Apost. p. 429.* † *Tertul. ad ver. Prax. c. 7. De Carne Christi. c. 11. & ad ver. Herm. c. 35.*

‡ See *Daille de Usu Patrum. l. 2. c. 4. p. 260. & 263.*

§ *Colos. 2. 9.*

usage in other parts, as *East* is to *West*? And not only this, but it will be likewise necessary to have an accurate knowledge of their manners, customs, traditions, philosophy, religious notions, sects, civil and ecclesiastical polity; of all which the common people know as little, as they do of the original languages; and having very obscure, & incompetent conceptions of the principal words, & phrases us'd in the versions, their Religion must needs be a very odd jumble of confus'd & inconsistent notions, were it to depend on words, & their precise meaning, & not on the things themselves, and their relations, which are plain and obvious to common capacities; they wou'd be in a manner intirely govern'd by sounds, some of which, such, as they us'd to hear spoken of with respect, they wou'd highly reverence, while others, tho' of the same signification, they wou'd as much abhor, till custom had made them familiar. And,

WERE Men not to be govern'd by things, but words, the consequence now wou'd be much worse than what happen'd on the confusion of languages at *Babel*; because no written Religion, for want of an universal language, cou'd become universal, & people must, without a competent skill in dead languages, be oblig'd to take their Religion on trust, from Men too, as subject to be deceiv'd, as they are often ready to deceive: Nay, the universality of language, cou'd it have preserv'd Religion uncorrupt, wou'd have done so in the *Antidiluvian* world, & before that confusion of language, which happen'd at *Eabel*.

If skill in languages cou'd make even the Learned certain, how comes it to pass, that what goes for orthodox in one Age, shall be heterodox in another? What is fundamental in one Church, be damnable error in another? Nay, must not every one, if at all vers'd in Church-History, say with Mr. *Chillingworth*?

„ * I see plain, & with my own eyes, that there are

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Popes

* *Relig. of Protestants. c. 6. Sect. 56. p. 290.*

„ Popes against Popes, Councils against Councils;
 „ some Fathers against others, the same Fathers
 „ against themselves, a consent of Fathers of one Age,
 „ against a consent of Fathers of another Age, the
 „ Church of one Age, against the Church of another
 „ Age? „ And do not the Clergy themselves think
 there's such uncertainty in the Scripture-language,
 even in things of the greatest moment, when they
 generally use unscriptural terms to express those things?
 And that they can't even here agree among them-
 selves, there needs no better proof than the disputes
 of our Divines about Fundamentals; tho' they are,
 to prevent all controversies of this nature, enacted,
 guarded with penal Laws, & all the Clergy, at every
 turn, oblig'd to subscribe 'em in the same words.

I could name two eminent Bishops, who, if they
 were to give a true account of their religious tenets,
 'tis thought, wou'd appear to differ very widely, even
 in what themselves term Fundamentals. But are not
 such differences utterly unavoidable as long as Men
 found their Religion on words and phrases thus du-
 bious, and not on the eternal Reason, & unalterable
 Relations of Things, obvious to the meanest capacity?

NOTWITHSTANDING the wide difference there
 is between all Christian Sects, from the *Papist* down
 to the *Quaker*, I can't help thinking, that an infinitely
 wise and good God has adapted the rules & evi-
 dences, of what he really requires from Mankind,
 to their general capacity, and that the certainty of
 every command, must be equal to the importance of
 the duty. How can we suppose some of the most ne-
 cessary duties of Religion, are only to be found in
 voluminous books, which the greatest part of mankind
 have, perhaps, never heard of, & of those that have,
 not one in a thousand understands a title of the lan-
 guages they are writ in, or is capable of examining
 into those records, from which the authority of these
 books are to be deriv'd?

Is not that an admirable *Hypothesis*, which, tho' it supposes God has endow'd Mankind with Reason to enable them to distinguish between Religion & Superstition, yet admits that almost all Mankind are incapable of doing it, but must alike, in all countries, depend on the authority of Men, hir'd to maintain the traditional Religion of the places where they live: who, perhaps, will tell them, that there was a time (happy those who liv'd in it) when Religion was suited to the capacities of the vulgar; being preach'd by inspir'd Men in the languages they understood, & miracles for their conviction wrought in their sight; but that now the scene was entirely chang'd, they had no miracles, no infallible Men to have recourse to, to set them right; & that their Religion by distance of time was not only become obscure, but that the whole of it, & the proofs on which its validity depends, are writ in languages, of which the people understand not a word; and that * „ the evidence „ arising from particular types & prophecies, is now, „ by length of time, & distance of place, & change „ of customs, become obscure & difficult to the ge- „ nerality of people, & cannot be thoroughly discuss'd „ without a great variety of knowledge concerning „ the ancient *Hebrew* customs, and the authority of „ their writings, & the exact calculation of time,, Which is in effect to suppose, that the Religion of the Vulgar must consist, in taking the words of their Teachers, however divided among themselves, for the word of God; and their Translations, for Law & Gospel; and that believing in them, is having a divine Faith; tho' one would think, whatever depended on human Traditions, & Translations, cou'd be but a human Faith.

E. THO' something of this nature is unavoidable, where Religion is writ in antiquated languages; yet in the main, are we not now more certain of the truth

* Ep. of London's Past. Lett. pag. 20, 21.

truth of our traditional Religion, than those who liv'd in former Ages, we having the authority of every past Age in confirmation of its truth?

A. Mr. Lock, speaking concerning *Assent* in matters, wherein testimony is made use of, *says*, * „ I think, „ it may not be amiss to take notice of a Rule observ'd in the Law of *England*, which is, that tho' the attested copy of a Record be good proof, yet the copy of a copy never so well attested, and by never so credible witnesses, will not be admitted as a proof in judicature. This is so generally approv'd as reasonable, and suited to the wisdom & caution to be us'd in our enquiry after material truths, that I never yet heard of any one that blamed it. This practice, if it be allowable in the decisions of right and wrong, carries this observation along with it, *viz.* That any testimony, the further off it is from the original truth, the less force & proof it has. The being & existence of the thing itself, is what I call the original truth. A credible Man vouching his knowledge of it, is a good proof: But if another, equally credible, do witness it from his report, the testimony is weaker; and a third that attests the hear-say of an hear-say, is yet less considerable. So that in traditional truths, each remove weakens the force of the proof. And the more hands the tradition has successively pass'd through, the less strength & evidence does it receive from them., -- † „ This is certain, that what in one Age was affirm'd upon slight grounds, can never after come to be more valid in future Ages, by being often repeated., I hope you will pardon me, if I presume to think, that God, at all times, is so good & impartial, that his will, on which the happiness of Mankind at all times depends, is at all times equally knowable; & consequently, must be founded

* *L. 4. c. 16. Sect. 10. pag. 382. al. pag. 562.*

† *Ibid. pag. 383. al. pag. 563. Sect. 11.*

on what is always alike discernable, the Nature and Reason of Things. Can a Religion, design'd for every one, not be within the reach of every one? Or can that, which above all things it concerns ALL Men to know, not be knowable by ALL?

- - - id, quod

Aque pauperibus prodest, locupletibus aequè;

*Aque neglectum pueris senibusque nocebit. **

Hec opus, hec studium parvi properemus & ampli;

Si patria volumus, si nobis vivere cari. †

* Hor. l. 1. Ep. 1. 24. † Ib. Ep. 3. 28.

AND certainly, nothing can be a greater libel on the true Religion, than to suppose it does not contain such internal marks, as will, even to the meanest capacity, distinguish it from all false Religions; so as that a Man, tho' unable to read in his Mother-tongue, may, without pinning his faith on any sect of Priests, know what God requires of him.

I have said nothing of the plainness, simplicity, & even universality of Religion, but what is agreeable to the description, which St. Paul, from the Prophet *Jeremiah*, gives of the Gospel dispensation; the express terms of which run thus, † *I will put my Laws into their mind, & write them in their hearts; and I will be unto them a God, & they shall be to me a People: & And they shall not teach every Man his Neighbour, & every Man his Brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.* As these words are too plain to need a comment, so I shall defer drawing any consequences from them, till I have first endeavour'd to free the Scripture from that obscurity, in which artful Men have involv'd it. And,

I shall, now, by way of recapitulation, mention what Mr. *Barbeyrac*, a Person of no small note in the learned world, says concerning the *Practical Science*

of

† Heb. 8. 10, 11. § Jer. 31. 33, 34.

of *Morality*; * „None can reasonably doubt, but that
 „ every Man, who will be happy, must needs, in
 „ order to make himself so, regulate his conduct after
 „ some certain manner; and that God, as the Author
 „ & Parent of all human race, does prescribe to all
 „ Men without exception, the duties which tend to
 „ procure them that happiness, which they so pas-
 „ sionately seek after. Now, from hence it necessarily
 „ follows, that the natural principles of this science
 „ are such as may be easily discover'd; and such too,
 „ as are proportionate to the capacities of all sorts of
 „ persons: So that to be instructed in this science,
 „ there will be no occasion to mount up to Heaven,
 „ or to have from thence any extraordinary Revela-
 „ tion for that purpose. -- It must be own'd, to the
 „ eternal glory of the supreme Legislator of Mankind,
 „ as well as to the utter confusion of themselves;
 „ that none can complain without injustice, that God
 „ has given him Laws, either impracticable, or in-
 „ viron'd with such obscurity, as cannot be penetrated
 „ by one who really has his duty at heart, notwith-
 „ standing all his pains & application. This the wisest
 „ Heathens have acknowledg'd; -- (and) the *Stoicks*,
 „ who made *Morality* their principal study, maintain'd,
 „ that their Philosophy was not above the reach of
 „ Women & Slaves; and that as the way to Virtue
 „ lies open to all Men without distinction; so there
 „ is no estate, or condition, with peculiar privileges
 „ exclusive of others, as to the faculty of knowing
 „ the principles & rules, at well of those duties which
 „ are common to all, as of those which belong to
 „ each particular. -- † The idea of a Creator,
 „ boundless in power, wisdom & goodness; and the
 „ idea of ourselves, as intelligent reasonable, and so-
 „ ciabile

* Historical and Critical Account of the Science of Mora-
 lity, in his prefatory Discourse to *Defensors*, of the Law
 of Nature & Nations, Engl. Transl. Sect. 1. p. 1. col. 1, 2.
 † Sect. 3. pag. 10. col. 2.

„ cialle Creatures: These two ideas, I say, if well
 „ look'd into, and compar'd together in their whole
 „ extent, will always furnish us with steady grounds
 „ of duty, & sure rules of conduct; notwithstanding
 „ it may sometimes so fall out, that, for want of care
 „ & attention, we may, in some uncommon cases,
 „ not know how to apply them; or cannot metho-
 „ dically demonstrate the necessary connexion of
 „ some remote consequences, with the first principles
 „ of Morality. — * 'Tis certain, that the intire con-
 „ formity of the Christian Morality, with the clearest
 „ dictates of right Reason, is one of the most con-
 „ vincing proofs of the divinity of the Christian Re-
 „ ligion; as has been acknowledg'd by all, who have
 „ wrote with any solidity on that subject. -- And if
 „ we duly weigh, & consider it, we shall find, that
 „ this is the proof, which of all others is the most
 „ affecting; & the best proportion'd to the common
 „ capacities of the bulk of Mankind. -- [Who]
 „ When they come at length to consider the Evan-
 „ gelical Morality, & find it intirely conformable both
 „ to their true interests, and to all those Principles,
 „ of which every Man has by nature the seeds in his
 „ own heart, they cannot then help concluding, that
 „ the Author of it must necessarily be that very Being,
 „ who has giv'n life, & brought 'em into this world,
 „ only to make 'em happy; provided they will not
 „ be wanting to themselves, but contribute on their
 „ part, all that lies in their own power, towards the
 „ attainment of their own felicity.

„ I might here commend to your perusal, what he,
 „ in several sections, affirms of the „ extreme negli-
 „ gence of the *publick Ministers of Religion*, in culti-
 „ vating the science of Morality; which, *as he says*, †
 „ being by them almost banish'd out of the world,
 „ took sanctuary among the Laicks, or undignify'd
 „ Men of Letters, who gave it a much better recep-
 „ tion.

* Sect. 32. p. 87, 88. † Sect. 12. p. 36. col. 1, 2.

„ tion. -- * No sooner did that admirable Treatise
 „ of *Grotius*, of *The Right of War & Peace*, appear in
 „ the world, but the Ecclesiasticks, instead of returning
 „ thanks to the Author for it, every where declar'd
 „ against him; and his Book was not only put into
 „ the expurgatory Index of the *Roman Catholick* In-
 „ quisitors, but many, even *Protestant* Divines, labour'd
 „ to cry it down. And thus it far'd too with Mr. *Paf-
 „ sendorff's* Book of *The Law of Nature and Nations*;
 „ the *Jesuits* at *Vienna* caus'd it to be prohibited;
 „ and many *Protestant* Divines, both of *Sueden* and
 „ *Germany*, did their best, to make this excellent
 „ work share every where else the same fate?

B. If these great Men were thus dealt with, for
 setting the *Science of Morality* in its due light; can you,
 who place Religion in the practice of Morality in
 obedience to the Will of God, & suppose there can
 be no other distinction between Morality & Religion,
 than that the former is acting according to the Reason
 of things consider'd in themselves, the other, acting
 according to the same Reason of things consider'd as
 the Will of God? Can You, I say, hope to escape
 being pelted by some of the same profession for such
 a crime as this?

A. THAT, I must own, wou'd be a favour I
 neither hope, nor wish for: since I am sensible, the
 shewing Religion to be no arbitrary Institution, but
 founded on the Nature of things, and their Relations,
 obvious to the capacity of all that dare use their Rea-
 son, must provoke all Ecclesiasticks of what deno-
 mination soever, who expect a blind submission from
 the Laity: tho' was it not for the authority that the
 High Church Clergy among the Reform'd lay claim
 to, when from *Protestant* principles they draw *Papist*
 conclusions, the pretences of the *Papist* Priests for the
 necessity of an *Infallible Guide*, wou'd appear ridicu-
 lous.

TH

* *Seft. II. pag. 36. col. 2.*

THE substance of what the *Papists* say, is in short,
 „ That if the Principles of *Protestants*, relating to
 „ private judgment, are true, the bulk of Mankind
 „ can't go beyond such plain rules of Religion as
 „ carry their own evidence with them; since other-
 „ wise they would be oblig'd to admit things, about
 „ which they are incapable of judging.

„ If, *say they*, the Religion of Peasants & Mecha-
 „ nicks, Men & Maid-Servants, the ignorant & illi-
 „ terate, must depend on books written in antiquated
 „ languages, of which they understand not one word,
 „ and are incapable of judging of the historical evi-
 „ dences of remote facts, on which the authority of
 „ those Books is founded, nor can know whether a
 „ Religion thus founded, has been faithfully convey'd
 „ down to them, must they not either be of that
 „ traditional Religion, which obtains in the Country
 „ where they live, (as none is without one) Or else
 „ must there not be some persons appointed to judge
 „ for them in matters of Religion, in whose deter-
 „ mination they may safely acquiesce? If this be
 „ *Popery*, there can be no mean between Popery &
 „ Natural Religion.

„ If, in the earliest times, Christians were split
 „ into many Sects, & each Sect had their particular
 „ Scriptures; are the common Christians now (when
 „ all the historical evidence is lost but of one side
 „ only, and that too they understand not) competent
 „ Judges in this matter? Or to condescend to par-
 „ ticulars. are they capable of judging in the Con-
 „ troversies between *Catholics* & *Protestants*, about
 „ the number of Canonical Books, Oral Tradition,
 „ the Authority of the Church, the uninterrupted
 „ Succession, & a thousand other things; especially
 „ such as relate to Mysteries; about which they are
 „ so far from being competent Judges, that they are
 „ not capable of understanding even the terms, in
 „ which the Learned choose to express themselves,

„ when they endeavour to explain their inexplicable
„ Mysteries?

„ OUGHT not the illiterate, if they had a just
„ sense of their own ignorance, to have been frightened,
„ upon their pretended Reformation, at the very
„ thoughts of leaving a Church, to which their An-
„ cestors had been so long united; (and which most
„ of their Adversaries own'd to be a true Church,
„ and deriv'd their authority from her;) upon the
„ account of opinions, they were no more capable
„ of judging, than they were of judging, after they
„ had left the Church, to which of the numerous
„ Sects they shou'd join themselves?

„ ALL *Protestant* Churches, have taken the same
„ methods to make people pay an absolute submission
„ to their decisions, as the Church of *Rome*, by ex-
„ communicating, & condemning, when they had
„ power, to perpetual imprisonment, or otherwise
„ punishing those who wou'd not renounce their
„ private opinions, when contrary to their decisions;
„ which is either condemning their own principles,
„ or their own practices so directly opposite to their
„ principles. But if this power of judging for the
„ People is, as the *Protestant* Clergy pretend, so ne-
„ cessary to preserve unity, that it must belong to
„ every particular, & *Protestant* Church, tho' founded
„ on the breach of *Catholick* unity, how came the
„ Church itself, before the pretended *Reformation*,
„ to want this power so necessary to preserve itself?

„ B. *Protestant* Divines, when press'd on this head,
usually distinguish between a just Authority, and an
absolute Authority.

A. CAN the Church of *Rome*, say its *Potaries*,
claim a greater authority, than the Church of *England*
does in her *Canons* of 1603; where she declares, *
„ All are *ipso facto* excommunicate, who shall affirm
„ she is not an orthodox & Apostolical Church; not

* Can. 3.

to be absolv'd, but by the Archbishop, after having
 „ publickly renounc'd this their impious error; and
 „ after the same manner excommunicates. * All,
 „ who shall affirm the *Articles* of 1562, made to avoid
 „ diversity of opinions, *ulla ex parte superstitiosos aut*
 „ *erroneos existere*; † All that speak against her Rites
 „ & Ceremonies, or condemn her Ordination, and
 „ her Discipline ‡ (tho' she herself complains of want
 „ of godly Discipline) by *Bishops, Deans, Arch-*
 „ *deacons*, &c. All *Schismatics*, & all Congregations
 „ not establish'd by Law, if they assume to themselves
 „ the name of a true, & lawful Church: „ Does not
 „ this, say the *Papists*, shew, that tho' the principles of
 „ the Church of England were *anti-popish*; yet that her
 „ practices, her Laws Civil as well as Ecclesiastical,
 „ before the *Revolution*, were *popish*; § since the Laws
 „ against all *Separatists* then extended to the loss, not
 „ only of estate & liberty, but even of life itself?

From these, & such like reasons, the *Papists* con-
 „ clude, that if the People are oblig'd to go a step
 „ beyond the plain & obvious rules of Natural Religion,
 „ there is, in the judgment of all Churches whatever,
 „ a necessity for them to have recourse to others to
 „ judge for them, unless there are to be as many Reli-
 „ gions as Judges.

D. How did our Reformers answer these objec-
 „ tions?

A. They being chiefly concern'd for the Autho-
 „ rity of the Scripture, & withal willing in their disputes
 „ with the *Papists* to support private judgment, said,
 „ That the Scriptures themselves, from their innate
 „ evidence, & by the illumination of the same holy
 „ Spirit which indited them, sufficiently shew'd them-
 „ selves to be the Will of God.

THE *Dutch* Confession publish'd in 1566, in the
 „ name of the *Belgian* Churches, after having recited 2

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* *Can. 5.* † *Can. 6. &c.* ‡ *Communion.*

§ See Mr. *Lact's* 3d Letter for Toleration, c. 4. p. 226.

Catalogue of the Books of Scripture, *says*, * „ These „ we receive as the only sacred & canonical Books ; „ not because the Church receives them as such, „ but because the holy Spirit witnesses to our con- „ sciences, that they proceed from God, and them- „ selves testify their authority.

THE *Gallican Churches*, in their Confession, go somewhat further, not only † „ declaring their faith „ in the Scriptures, to depend on the testimony of „ the internal persuasion of the Spirit, but that thereby „ they know the Canonical from the Ecclesiastical, i. e. „ Apocryphal Books. And,

THE Assembly of Divines at *Westminster*, maintain'd, that ‡ „ Our full persuasion and assurance of the in- „ fallible truth thereof, (the Scriptures) is from the „ inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness „ by, & with the words in our hearts.

As to foreign Divines, I shall only mention that great Reformer *Calvin*, who *says*, § „ All must allow, „ that there are in the Scriptures manifest evidences „ of God speaking in them. -- The Majesty of God „ in them will presently appear to every impartial „ examiner, which will extort our assent : So that „ they act preposterously, who endeavour by any ar- „ gument to beget a solid credit to the Scriptures. — „ The Word will never meet with credit in Mens „ minds, till it be seal'd by the internal testimony of „ the Spirit who wrote it.

OUR learned *Whittaker*, in his Controversy about the Scripture against *Bellarmino*, gives this account of the Doctrines of the Church ; ¶ „ The Sum, *says* he, „ of our opinion is, that the Scriptures have all their „ authority & credit from themselves ; that they are „ to be acknowledg'd and receiv'd, not because the Church

* *Harm of Confes.* p. 12, 13. † *Art. of Harm of Con- fes.* pag. 10. ‡ *Chap. 1. Sect. 5.*

§ *Institut. Christ. Religi.* l. 1. c. 7. *Sect.* 4, 5.

¶ *Century. de Script. Quest.* 3. c. 1. p. 286.

Church has appointed or commanded so, but because they came from God; but that they came from God, cannot be certainly known by the Church, but from the Holy Ghost. And.

INDEED, our Church supposes no Man can be a good Christian, without being inspir'd; by saying, * *Works done before the Grace of Christ, & the inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasing to God: -- yea, -- we doubt not, but that they have the nature of sin.* And,

As to the *Dissenters*, I shall only quote Dr. Owen, a Man not long since very eminent among them, who is as zealous in maintaining this opinion as any of the first Reformers; his words are, † „ The Scriptures of the Old & New Testament do abundantly, „ and uncontrollably manifest themselves to be the „ Word of the living God; so that merely on the „ account of their own proposal to us, in the name „ & Majesty of God as such, without the contribution of help, or assistance from Tradition, Church, „ or any thing else without themselves, we are oblig'd „ upon the penalty of eternal damnation, to receive „ them with that subjection of soul, which is due to „ the word of God. The Authority of God shining „ in them, they afford unto us all the divine evidence „ of themselves, which God is willing to grant us, „ or can be granted to us, or is any way needful „ for us. „ And lest the *Quakers* should take it amiss, „ if while I quote other Sects, I shou'd overlook them; R. Barclay says, ‡ „ How necessary 'tis to seek the „ certainty of the Scripture from the Spirit, the infinite janglings, and endless contests of those who „ seek their authority elsewhere, do witness to the „ truth thereof. „ And then proceeds to prove those infinite janglings, & endless contests.

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* Artic. 13. † Dr. Owen's Dis. of the div. Orig. of the Script. c. 2. Sect. 3. & c. 4. 5.

‡ Prop. 3. 172. 79.

THE Reform'd wou'd have argu'd unanswerably, had they contented themselves with saying, that there are no Doctrines of a divine original contain'd in the Gospel dispensation, but what by their innate excellency are knowable to be such, as being *writ in our minds*, and *put into our hearts* by God himself; as is expressly declar'd by the Prophet *Jeremiah*, * & repeated and reasserted by the Apostle, and by Christ himself. But,

OUR Divines, it seems, at last found out, that the Reformers, and their Successors, had embrac'd Christianity on such grounds, as they believ'd wou'd equally serve any other Religion, where there was a strong persuasion; and being zealous for certain things, which do not carry any internal marks of their truth, or in other words, of being *taught of God*, they fell into strange inconsistencies; sometimes talking like *Hobbiſts*, of the power of the Magistrate; sometimes like *Papiſts*, of the authority of the Church in religious matters; and sometimes maintaining both, and private judgment too, in the same discourse, if not in the same section; which made their Adversaries treat them as a pack of tricking, chicaning wretches, who had no regard to truth, or consistency, or any thing but their private interest.

THE opinion, now, which seems to be espous'd by some, who wou'd be thought the only true Churchmen, is, what the late learned Dr. *Rogers* maintains; who, tho' he agrees with the *Papiſts*, that the People are incapable of judging for themselves in most points of Religion; yet, to do him justice, he puts the Church of *Rome* but upon a level with all other Churches of what Religion soever, that chance to be uppermost, for he lays it down as a Principle, † „ That tho' no „ Man ought upon any Authority to believe contradictions, or profess an assent to evident falsehoods; yet

* *Jer.* 31. 33. *Hebr.* 10. 16. *John* 6. 45.

† Pref. to Dr. *Roger's* 3 Sermon. pag. 53, 54.

yet in questions, where he must in the event be determin'd by some Authority or other, he may reasonably prefer the Authority appointed by publick wisdom, and may justly be requir'd so to do. --

* The bulk of Mankind are manifestly unable to form a judgment either of the arguments by which he (his Antagonist) endeavours to subvert our Religion, or establish his own; whether they adhere to us, or go to him, they must unavoidably rely on his, or our Authority for the truth of the suggestions on which their conclusion depends; & we presume our word will go as far as his. This is asserting that people are oblig'd to take their Religion on trust, & then to change it as often as there's any change in the State-Religion; or as often as they change their residence; and in all these changes to be govern'd by Men, who are hir'd, not to find out truth, but to make that Religion, to which their Preferments are annex'd, to pass for true. And if People will not be govern'd, the Legislature, or in the Doctor's phrase, *Publick Wisdom may justly require them so to do.* Nor is the matter mended, by excepting contradictions and evident falsehoods, since here too, if private persons & Authority differ, publick Wisdom will certainly be on the side of the Authority it sets up, & 'tis in such things that the publick Wisdom in most Christian Countries has exerted itself with the utmost cruelty. So that the whole question between the *Papist* & the Doctor (both sides agreeing that Men can't believe contradictions & evident falsehoods; and that there are things, which the People are incapable of knowing, or if known, can't judge whether they are true or not,) is, on whom the People in these points must pin their Faith? Whether there are certain standing Judges appointed by Christ, who shall infallibly lead them into the truth? Or whether in every Christian Country, the People are bound to be of the Religion of those

fallible, not to say, self-interested Guides, Publick Wisdom has authoris'd. Here it must be confess'd, the Doctor is against the Pope of *Rome*, but 'tis to set himself up in his stead; & he accordingly maintains, that those who are committed to his care, are in things of which they can't judge, to follow his judgment; and says, * „tho' he may mistake, & in consequence „ of it mislead them, yet they will have this defence „ before Christ, that they have sought his Will in the „ methods which he has directed, and, where they „ wanted a Guide, prefer'd one appointed to that „ office according to his Institution. But why may not a Parish-Priest appointed by Publick Wisdom in *North-Britain*, *France*, or any other country, say the same to people incapable of judging in these points? Is not this supposing, that the Christian Religion in many points, is so fram'd, that in every Parish the People must follow the judgment of their Parish-Priest, because they are to seek (and what more can be requir'd of them) Christ's will in the manner the Parish-Priest tells them Christ directs. And is not this *Popery*, even worse than *Roman Popery*, as it is setting up a *Pope* in every Parish? And obliging the People as often as any of them change their Parish, or he his Parish, or his mind, to change their Religion too, in every thing that is not self-evident, or a manifest contradiction, in compliance with their present *Parish-Pope*?

I can't but remark, how good Wits, tho' they liv'd in very distant times, & seem of very different Religions, have luckily hit on the same thought; I mean *Vergerius*, who, in *Luther's* days, was *Nuncio* to the *Pope*; and *Dr. Rogers*, late Chaplain to a *Protestant* King, at the Head of the *Protestant* Interest. The former said to *Luther*, † If you would have had any thing innovated in the Faith, in which you were bred

* *Vindic. of Civil Establish.* pag. 205.

† *Father Paul's Hist. of the Council. of Trent.* p. 75.

up for 35 years, for your conscience and salvation sake, it was sufficient to have kept it to yourself. The latter asserts, * „ That in the Christian Religion, the Apostle's „ Rule is, *Hast thou Faith, have it to thyself?* And yet 'tis plain, the Apostle was persecuted by the *Rogerians* of those days, for not keeping his Faith to himself.

B. WHATEVER *Vergerius* might deserve from *Papists* Publick Wisdom, for misapplying this text, to put a stop to the Reformation; A *Protestant* Divine could deserve nothing but contempt from *Protestant* publick or private Wisdom, for so notoriously perverting its meaning, and openly bantering our first Reformers; and not only condemning them, for not keeping their Religion to themselves, but asserting, that all, † who (without a special commission) from the beginning of the world to this day, have ‡ „ la- „ bour'd by publick preaching, or writing, to with- „ draw Mens submission to the establish'd Religion, „ whether *Turan, Mahometan, or Papisb*, and gather „ Congregations in opposition to it, contrary to the „ command of the Magistrate; „ have been guilty of the damnable sin of disobedience & sedition. So that if *Papery* had been establish'd by Law in King *James's* Reign, all *Protestants* must have kept their Religion in their own breasts, since publickly professing a Religion can't but be unlawful, where there's no coming at it, but by unlawful means. The *Papists*, sure, need no other arguments, to shew the unlawfulness of the Reformation in most places, than what this Reverend Divine has furnish'd them with. And tho' he declares himself an enemy to all persecution, & owns, § „ that „ if there be no publick worship, there must be all „ the appearance that can be of absolute Irreligion: „ yet the chief design of his *Vindication of the Civil* „ *Establishment* is to prove, that all Magistrates, of

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* Pref. to his 8 Sermon. pag. 63. † Pag. 158.

‡ Pag. 125. § Pag. 29.

„ what Religion soever, have a right to oblige all,
 „ but those of their own Communion, to keep their
 „ Religion to themselves. „ Which is declaring for
 Persecution as well as Irreligion; since all Men believe
 'tis their duty publickly to worship God, tho' contrary
 to all human commands; and he himself dares not
 say he would obey such commands.

AND his distinction between Mens acting with, or
 without a special commission, is impertinent in rela-
 tion to a Magistrate, who owns no such commission;
 & the whole is inconsistent with that authority, which,
 in another place, he gives to the Church or Clergy,
 of prescribing what Doctrines shall be taught, & what
 not. But if the Magistrate, for the sake of the State,
 can forbid the publick profession of all Religions but
 one, why not that one? since I believe, there's scarce
 any instance where the profession of but one has been
 permitted, but that Religion soon degenerated into
 Priestcraft, to the entire destruction of Mens civil li-
 berties; and the Magistrate, as well as his Subjects,
 has been forc'd to submit to the arbitrary, and vile
 impositions of his own Priests.

In short, this noble scheme, if there's any consis-
 tency in it, is, that in all matters of Religion, where
 people are capable of judging, they must not, if the
 Magistrate thinks not fit, openly profess their Religion;
 and in all other things, which depend on Book-
 learning, they are to be govern'd by their respective
 Parish-Popes. And if such a scheme as this, could re-
 commend the person that publish'd it, to a much
 larger Parish-Popedom than he had before; 'tis high
 time for the Lairy to consider, whether all the blood
 & treasure which have been spent to keep out but one
 Pope, has not been spent in vain, if, instead of that
 one, we are now to have thousands?

A. I do not find, that the Apostles taught there was
 any thing in Religion, of which People were incapable
 of judging; for tho' Men could not well be lower in
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point of understanding, than those to whom the Gospel was first preach'd; yet even these are commanded to *judge for themselves, to prove all things, to take heed to what they hear, to try the Spirits, to avoid false Prophets, Seducers, & blind Guides.* And if this was their duty in the Apostolick times, it was, certainly, so in all after-Ages; and if there are now any such things, by what Authority soever introduc'd, as make the Apostolical Rule impracticable, I shall, with submission to Dr. Rogers, venture to affirm, they are no part of the Christian Religion, & that those who teach them are *false Prophets, Seducers, & Deceivers*, and as such, are to be shunn'd by all Christians.

St. Chrysostom thinks Religion so very plain, that he says, * „ Were it not for our sloth, we had no „ need of Teachers. „ And we do not find that even the Fathers thought the People, as not being able to judge for themselves, were to believe in their Parish-Priests. Lactantius, for instance, says, † „ That in „ those things, especially which concern our life „ eternal, it becomes every Man to search, & examine „ the truth of them by his own sense & judgment, „ rather than to expose himself by a foolish credulity, „ to the hazard of being seduc'd into other Mens errors. And St. Basil tells us, ‡ „ It is the duty of auditors „ not to believe implicitly, but to examine the words „ of those that instruct them. „ And all our Divines, I mean such as are, what they pretend, *Protestants*, shew they have not so mean an opinion of the understanding of the People, by frequently exhorting them *to judge for themselves*; & telling them, „ They have „ no reason to expect Heaven, if they will not be at „ the pains of examining what wou'd bring them „ thither, and that the luckiness of the accident, „ shon'd they stumble on truth, wou'd not atone for „ the neglect of this grand duty.

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* *Herm. 3. en 2 Thef. To. 4. pag. 234. Ed. Sav.*

† *Inj. l. 2. c. 7. ‡ Basil Mor. Reg. 72. To. 2. p. 372.*

A judicious Divine of our Church very justly observes * „ That they, who have a good cause, need „ no disingenuous arts; they will not fright Men from „ considering what their Adversaries say, by denouncing „ damnation against them; nor forbid them to „ read their Books, but rather encourage them so to „ do; that they may see the difference between „ truth and falsehood, between Reason & Sophistry, „ with their own eyes. --- And whensoever Guides „ of a party do otherwise, they give just cause to „ those who follow them to examine their Doctrines „ so much the more carefully, by how much they „ are unwilling to have them examin'd. 'Tis a bad „ sign, when Men are loth to have their opinions „ seen in the day, but *love darkness rather than light*.

THIS fault of the People, even from the beginning, has been, as the memorable Mr. Hales observes, that „ † They, thro' loth and blind obedience, examin'd „ not the things they were taught; but, like beasts „ of burden, patiently couch'd down, & indifferently „ underwent whatever their Superiors laid upon them.

HAPPY would the Laity have been, if they had giv'n no just occasion for this infamous character: tho' if they had follow'd the example of their Clergy in this one thing, of being as true to their common interest, as these have always been to the separate interest of their own order, that alone would have preserv'd Religion in its native simplicity; as being a thing wholly design'd for their general good; and then it would have been out of the power of the Priests to corrupt it.

B. Is not this supposing, most, if not all, the corruptions of Religion, which have prevail'd in any Church, are owing to their impositions, & the blind deference of the Laity?

A.

* *Clagger's Persuasive to an ingenuous Tryal of Opinions in Relig.* p. 25. † *Tract of Schism.*

A. IF you think I speak this without just grounds, examine into the present, & past state of *Christendom*; & see whether all those gross depravations, & perversions of Religion, which have prevail'd in most places, were not contriv'd to advance the separate interests of the Ecclesiasticks; and Religion been corrupted, in an exact proportion to the number, riches, influence, & power of these Reverend Gentlemen? Now these corruptions being calculated for their interest, cou'd a majority without a *miracle*, (as Bishop Burnet says, * in relation to our *Reformation*) agree in correcting those abuses? And I may add, that in all Countries, where people have not had the liberty to judge for themselves in religious matters, no other liberty has been preserv'd; but Men have been slaves both in body & mind: Such power has the united force of Ecclesiasticks!

A judicious Author says, †, It was not unreasonable „ in the beginning of the Reign of *Edward VI.* and „ Queen *Elizabeth*, to think the Lord and Commons „ better Judges of Religion than the Bishops & Con- „ vocation. The whole body can have no sinister „ interest to blind them; but the whole Clergy, „ which is but a part of the whole body, may; and „ therefore the whole body is to judge of this. The „ meanest Man is as much interest'd, and concern'd „ in the truth of Religion, as the greatest Priest; for „ tho' his knowledge thereof be not in all respects „ equally easy, yet in some respects it may be easier. „ For want of learning does not so much hinder the „ light of the layman, as worldly advantage & faction „ sometimes does the Priest; & the examples of these „ are infinite. Corruption in the Church before our „ Saviour, and in our Saviour's days, & ever since, „ has oftner begun among the greatest Priests, Rabbies, „ & Bishops, than among the meanest Laity.

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* *Introduit. to his Exposit. of the Art. pag. 5.*

† *Of the true grounds of Eccl. Regimen, pag. 84.*

WHAT St. Paul says to the Christians of Corinth, in relation to false Apostles, has been verify'd in all Ages: * *Ye suffer Fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. -- Ye suffer if a Man bring you into bondage; if a Man devour you, if a Man take of you, if a Man exalt himself, if a Man smite you on the face.* And, indeed, the Laicks have so seldom thought of asserting their natural rights in religious matters, that they have generally sacrific'd to the malice of the Priests, all, who have endeavour'd to maintain these rights; & if the People threw off one set of Ecclesiastical Tyrants, 'twas only to be slaves to another; and were ever ready to join against any one, that endeavour'd to set them free from all Ecclesiastical Tyranny, under which the whole Christian World would still have groan'd, had not so many accidents concurr'd at the *Reformation*.

WE pray against being *led into temptation*, but do we not lead the Clergy into almost irresistible temptation, to impose what they please on the People? What may not Men, who, in a manner, engross the teaching of the young, & instructing the old; (& have great powers, & vast revenues, & those too daily increasing) bring about by their joint endeavours; and that much more easily, than when they had nothing to depend on but the alms of the people? What is it, that such a confederacy, so modell'd, may not effect, especially where they are caress'd by all parties, nay, even by that, which is by too many of them despis'd, & hated for their unpardonable crime of being against persecution? Are the Clergy less selfish, & designing, than they were in those times some call the *purest*? Or, are the Laity grown wiser, & by the experience of so many Ages, more upon their guard?

PEOPLE abroad were surpris'd to find a Nation, in former times so miserably oppress'd by the Ecclesiasticks, capable, even under a *Whigg* administration, of

* 2 Cor. II. 19, 20.

of repealing that Statute of *Mortmain*, which their Predecessors thought absolutely necessary to prevent an all-devouring Corporation from swallowing every thing; and at the same time to see the *First-Fruits & Tenths*, granted at the *Reformation* to the Crown, as a just acknowledgement of the Regal supremacy, to be given for ever to this insatiable Corporation; and at a time too, when their revenues were daily encreasing. These surprising favours made foreigners very inquisitive to know, how the conduct of the Clergy had merited more since the *Revolution*, than it did at the *Reformation*; or any other time since the *Reformation*? But begging pardon for this necessary digression, I shall now shew, from the confession of that great Divine & Philosopher, Dr. *H. More*, how little reason the Laity, tho' of the meanest capacity, have to depend upon the authority of Church-men: His words are,

„ * THERE'S scarce any Church in *Christendom*
 „ at this day, which does not obtrude not only plain
 „ falsehoods, but such falsehoods as will appear, to any
 „ free spirit, pure contradictions and impossibilities;
 „ and that with the same gravity, authority, & im-
 „ portunity, as they do the holy Oracles of God. „
 If this be true, what a miserable condition must the People be in, if they are to depend on this *gravity, authority, and importunity* of their respective Priests; who, 'tis possible, may not believe the *Creeeds & Articles* they subscribe, & yet be against making the least change, for fear of putting the People upon examining into other things, wherein the interest of the Clergy is more nearly concern'd; which may occasion them to assume to themselves the unpardonable crime of seeing with their own eyes, & judging with their own understandings. That *Convocation* † very well knew what they did, which in 1689 with so much indignation rejected those proposals, that some of our most emi-

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* *Mystery of Godliness*, pag. 495.

† See Dr. *Clarke's* Script. Doctrine, &c. p. 450.

nent Divines were by the Crown authoris'd to offer them; for making alterations in the *Liturgy*, particularly, in leaving the Clergy at liberty with relation to the *Athanasian Creed*.

IN short, whoever in the least reflects, must needs see, that in most Churches, many of their fundamental articles are design'd to impose on the credulous Laity, and that the Priests themselves can't believe them. Can the Pope of *Rome* any more believe himself infallible, than the *Tartarian* Pope, or *Lama*, believes himself immortal? Or than *Protestant* Priests (whose Churches are founded on private judgment) can believe they have a right to make *Creees & Articles* for the People? Can even the *Romish* Priests any more believe they can pardon sins, than the *Renzes* believe the money they borrow in this world, shall be repaid to their Creditors in the next? Or can the *Popish* Priests, tho' they made the Laity for many Ages renounce their senses, have different ideas of the *Bread & Wine*, after they have mumb'd over certain words, than they had before? Or can the *Lutheran* Priests believe they have the power of *Consubstantiation*? Or the *Calvinistical* Priests think, they can make the body and blood of Christ to be, not figuratively, or, not indeed, but *verily*, & *indeed*, taken by the faithful? Or can any of these Priests believe they give the Holy Ghost? Or that they have an *indelible character*? Or that there can be *Imperium in Imperio*? Or can the *Popish* Priests any more believe their *legendary Traditions*, than the *Pagan* Priests did their Oracles? Or some other Priests the doctrine of *passive-obedience*? Or the *Calvinistical* articles they so solemnly subscribe? Or that *axes* on one hand, & *bribes* on the other, is the way to promote the *Protestant* principle, of every Man's being oblig'd to judge for himself in all religious matters, without prejudice & partiality? Or an hundred other things, which, with this same gravity, authority, & importunity, they impose on the People?

IF Men, notwithstanding they pretend to be *insensibly mov'd by the Holy Ghost*, go into Orders, as they take to a trade, to make the best of its mysteries (and all trades have their mysteries;) and are bound for the sake of their maintenance, to maintain those doctrines which *maintain* them, and lest they shou'd not do so, are shackl'd with *subscriptions* upon *subscriptions*; can these Men, I say, under all the prejudices this world affords, be proper persons for the Laity to depend on in the choice of their Religion? Or, are they, who are not permitted to choose their own Religion, fit to choose a Religion for others? In this case, wou'd not *the blind lead the blind into the ditch of Popery*, &c.? And I think, I may venture to say, that Men may as safely trust the choice of their Religion to the chance of a dye, as to the chance of education; considering who, for so many Ages, have had the cooking up of Religion. And every one must see, that those things, which are brought into Religion, contrary to the end of it, as they are inconsistent with the interest of the People, so they favour more of art & learning, than to belong to simple Men, especially in those times they were introduc'd. And as Adam said to God, * *The Woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat*; so might the People say of their Priests, did they believe them *jure divino*; „ The Priests thou gavest us, „ deceiv'd us, & we have been deceiv'd.

B. THIS is too severe.

A. YOU know, that those few good Men among the Ecclesiasticks, have said as much of their own body, and therefore, I shall only mention what *Picus Mirandula* had the courage to say to *Leo the Tenth*, & the *Lateran Council*. He, after having complain'd, that all Orders of Men were debauch'd by the Clergy, says, † *Nec sane mirum, quando malum omne prodire de*
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* Gen. 3. 12. † See *Fascic. Rerum. Expt. & fugient.*
 16. 1. pag. 418, 419.

Templo Johannes Chrysostomus censet; & Hieronimus scribit, se invenisse neminem qui seduzerit Populos; præterquam Sacerdotes. Tho' 'twas not always they could corrupt them, for the celebrated St. Ambrose says, Plerumque Clerus erravit, Sacerdotis nutavit sententia, Droites cum seculi istius terreno rege senserunt, Populus fidem propriam reservavit.

THIS can be no reflection on the Ecclesiastics among us, who abhor all these principles; by which their predecessors enslav'd Men both body and soul; & who maintain no opinions, however advantageous to the Order, that are against the publick good, and are so far from promoting persecution; that by their example as well as writings, they have highly contributed to that humanity, charity, and benevolence, which, to the great grief of others, is daily increasing among Men of the most different persuasions. Thus, where the Clergy are good, the People of course will be so; & therefore, such Clergymen (of which, perhaps, we now have more, than have ever been in the Church since *Constantine's* time,) can't be too much esteem'd, for conquering the strong prejudice of education, & the stronger of interest. And they, certainly, ought to be as much valu'd by the Laity for so unusual a generosity, in defending the common rights of Mankind, as they are hated by their Brethren, for giving up those claims; by which they have at all times commanded the purses, as well as the consciences of the people; when too, they could not but be sensible, what they were to expect from their restless enemies, whenever they should be permitted to exert themselves.

AND here I can't omit saying, that, if he, who best defends the Church, best deserves to rule it, Justice has eminently appear'd in the promotion of that person, now happily presiding over it, who so early put a stop to the boasted Triumphs of the ablest adversary

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our Church ever had; & has since protected it against its worst, its domestick Enemies, treacherously undermining the Constitution; who, as he treats all with that condescending goodness inseparable from true greatness, so he encourages Piety & Virtue, without distinction of parties; and tho' he has with equal prudence expos'd both *Papists* & *Protestant persecution*; yet both the *Sorbonne* & *Geneva*, however differing in most other things, agree in owning so illustrious a merit. And I may challenge all Church-History to show three such Bishops, as to the honour of the *Revolution*, have, since that blessed time, succeeded one another at *Lambeth*.

I must beg your patience for adding, on this inexhaustible subject, one reason more, for Mens being govern'd by things, rather than words. It has been a general practice with the introducers of civil tyranny, tho' they chang'd the form of Government, to retain the old names; the better to hinder people from being sensible of the change: And may not this have happen'd in Church-matters? And may not Ecclesiastical tyranny be brought in, & supported by the same means? Has not this very term *Church*, had a different meaning put on it, from what it has in the original? And is not the *Greek* word sometimes translated *Assembly*, sometimes *Church*; the better to confound the rights of the *Church*, or *People*, as that word in Scripture always signifies? In one of our Articles, the *Church* is defin'd to be a *Congregation of the Faithful*, &c. yet is it not every where else taken for the *Clergy*? When 'tis said in the very next Article, „ The Church has power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, and Authority in matters of Faith; „ is it meant of the *Congregation of the Faithful*? And is it not a constant practice with some Men, to talk of the power & authority of the Church, when they only mean their own, in hopes to make that, which other-

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wife people might start at, go down under its sacred name?

ARE the People now taught to conceive the same thing by the word *Bishop*, as it means in the original, where *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are synonymous terms? Is it not to prevent their seeing it, that we translate the Greek word sometimes by *Overseer*, sometimes by *Bishop*? For the first three, or four centuries, every Congregation had its own Bishop, who was constantly oblig'd to reside, & to officiate in the Parish Church: And as among the *Jews*, the *Ruler of one Synagogue* had nothing to do in any other; so among the primitive Christians (whose discipline was accommodated to that of the *Jews*,) it would have been thought highly anti-christian, and invading the rights of his Brethren, for one Bishop to have more than one *Altar*, or *Communion-table*. But things continually changing, a Parish Bishop, maintain'd by the Alms of his congregation, commenc'd a Bishop, not only of many Parishes, but of a whole Province; nay, of many Provinces, with the titles, pomp, & grandeur of Princes, and at last, to an *Universal Bishop*, *Pope*, or *Vice-God*.

THE only Church that has now any pretence to primitive Episcopacy, is that of *North Britain*; where since the *Blessed Revolution*, a parity of Parish-Bishops has been establish'd. If you want fully to understand the Constitution of the primitive Church, in this, & all other points, you need only read the *Inquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church*, &c. written by the greatest Critick, Divine, & Lawyer of this, or, perhaps, any other Age.

WHAT other reason can be assign'd, why *diacon*? *Rom. 16. 1.* is not render'd *Deaconess*, as well as elsewhere *Deacon*, but *Servant of the Church*; except it be to hinder the people from perceiving, that there was in the days of the Apostles, an *Order of Women* who had something more to do in the Church than to sweep it, and who, even at the Council of *Nice*

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(*Can. 19.*) are reckon'd among the Clergy? Did *Heresy*, or *Schism*, (those religious *Scare-crows*, as the memorable Mr. *Hales* calls them;) signify any such thing in the days of the Apostles, as afterwards, to the infinite prejudice of *Christendom*, they were made to mean? Why do we give the name of *Priest* to the Jewish *Sacrificer*, as well as to the Christian *Elder* (things so widely different,) but to make People believe the latter have a *Divine Rights* to every thing, which, under the *Theocracy*, belong'd to the former? And as in the New Testament the *Preachers of the Gospel* are never term'd *Levites*, or *Priests*, so *Scaliger* * remarks that the word so apply'd, is not to be met with till after *Justin's* time.

HAS the word *Clergy* the same meaning now, as in the New Testament, where 'tis taken in opposition to those we now call so? And did not Ecclesiastical tyranny, & the ingrossing that name by the Ministers of the Church commence together?

NOR is it difficult to see the reason, why the word, *Βαπτισμα* was not translated but naturaliz'd, since the People would then have perceiv'd, that, not *sprinkling*, but *dipping*, or *immersing*, was meant by it; but should any now (so much custom has prevail'd) say *John the Dipper*, instead of *John the Baptist*, the People would think it profane.

IF words have been thus artfully manag'd in relation to things, have not people much more reason to suspect the same management in relation to speculative points, where words allow a greater latitude? If *zeal* had had the same meaning in after-times, as in the Scripture, it had never occasion'd so much mischief. And what mischief have not those two misinterpreted words, *Zeal* & *Church*, by the artful management of designing Men, occasion'd? Nay, is not *Religion* made to signify something very different from what it does in Scripture? How few, when they hear that word,

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* *Scalligerana*, *Levite*.

think of the description given by St. James, * of pure, undefil'd Religion? What absurdities have not people brought into Religion, by fixing a sense on the word *mystery* unknown to the Scripture? Nay, have not some people, if the University of Oxford is a good Judge, advanc'd false, impious, & heretical doctrines concerning the Godhead, in declaring the † *three Persons are three distinct, infinite Minds or Spirits*; tho' now reviv'd by Dr. W---d, with the applause of those who before condemn'd it? And did not they, who espous'd those doctrines, represent their adversaries as absurd *Sabellians*; in either making the three Persons in the divine Being, to be analogous to three postures in a human being; (for this was the utmost Dr. *Scud's* Divinity could reach to) Or with Dr. *Wallis*, *three somewhat*, of which they themselves had no idea? Good God! what pains Men take to deface the idea, which the Light of Nature as well as the Scripture gives of God; and which every one conceives, when he hears him mention'd on either a natural, political, or religious account.

In short, was it not running too far from our present purpose, it would not be very difficult to shew, that there are very few terms in Scripture, which have things of moment depending on them, but what have lost their original meaning, to become orthodox.

Is they, who have the translating any old Book capable of vastly different senses, make it speak what is most for their interest, must not others be very good Men indeed, who will find fault with a translation in such points as make for their common advantage; or be at the pains in such case, to discover any favourable additions, subtractions or alterations that might have been made in the Scriptures, or other antient writings? especially if it be true what

Mr.

* Jam. i. 27. † Oxford Decree made by the Heads of Colleges and Halls in 1693.

Mr. Whiston complains of; * That it is frequently in the mouths of the Writers for the Church, that some things are to be conceal'd for fear they gratify *Atheists & Deists*, and says, Certainly, nothing prejudices them more than such procedure & expressions, while they thereby perceive remains of pious frauds every where, & suspect it has been so from the beginning. They see they are not to be let plainly into the truth of facts, but to be manag'd with cunning & worldly prudence, for fear of being disgusted at Christianity.

MUST not the People be at a loss, when they see how differently the texts in the most momentous parts are interpreted? Dr. S. Clark has reckon'd up more than 1250 texts relating to the doctrine of the *Trinity*; and how few of them are interpreted alike by the contending parties? 'Tis chiefly owing to these different interpretations, that, where force has not interpos'd, it has from Age to Age been disputed, whether we have but one, or more than one object of supreme worship. A point, which, was Reason allow'd to be a competent Judge, would not meet with the least difficulty; & had we a Bible translated by *Unitarians*, many texts would be very differently translated, from what they are at present; & some left out as forg'd. When so judicious a Divine and Critick as the now Bishop of A-- says, † „ We should have more of the true text by being less tenacious of the printed one; must not that give great uneasiness to those, who have nothing to trust to, but the printed text? And will this uneasiness be abated by his affirming, „ that it may with great truth be said of *Chillingworth*, ‡ „ (the greatest Champion the *Protestant* cause ever had) that he was abler at pulling down than building up; towards which little can be expected from one, who

T 4

* *Postscript to the Convoc. Proceedings*, pag. 90.

† *Clergyman's Thanks to Philol.*

‡ *Defen. of his Sermon against the Bp. of Bangor*, p. 31.

„ who is by his own arguments push'd so hard in
 „ the defence he would make of *Protestantism*, that
 „ he has nothing left, but to cry out, *The Bible*, I say,
 „ *The Bible is the Religion of Protestants*. „ Nay, must
 not that uneasiness be very much increas'd by Divines,
 perpetually endeavouring to mend by their criticisms
 several capital places in the sacred Writers; nay, who
 pretend daily to make new & momentous discoveries?
 How must their hearers be edify'd, when they tell
 them 'tis *thus* or *thus*, in such an antient *Manuscript*,
Father, or *Assembly of Fathers*; or cry, 'tis render'd
more agreeable to the mind of the Holy Ghost in the *Sep-*
tuagint, *Vulgar Latin*, *Syriack*, *Chaldaick*, *Ethiopick*,
Coptick, *Gothick*, or some other version.

I am no Court of Judicature, tho' in a thing of small
 moment, will admit of a copy, tho' taken from the
 original, without oath made by a disinterested person
 of his having compar'd it (because the least mistake,
 a various pointing, a parenthesis, a letter misplac'd
 may alter the sense) how can we absolutely depend
 in things of the greatest moment, on voluminous
 writings, which have been so often transcrib'd by Men,
 who never saw the original; (as none, even of the
 most early Writers pretend they did :) And Men too,
 who even in the earliest times, if we may judge by
 the number of forg'd passages, & even forg'd books,
 would scruple at no pious frauds. And tho' there have
 been innumerable copies of the New Testament lost,
 which, no doubt, had their different Readings, yet as
 it stands at present, we are told, there are no less
 than 30000 various readings.

B. T W O there are so many various readings, yet
 does not that great *Critick*, Doctor *Bentley*, in his
 Proposal for printing by subscription, a new edition
 of the New Testament, assure the world, * „ That out
 „ of a labyrinth of 30000 various readings which
 crowd

* *Proposals for Printing by Subscription a new Edit.*
of the New Testament.

crowd the pages of our present best editions, all put upon an equal credit to the offence of many good persons, that his *due*; as he calls it, so leads & extricates us, that there will be scarce 200 out of so many thousands, that can deserve the least consideration.

A. HAS this Critick lost his *due*, and so forc'd to drop the noble design of ascertaining the Text of the New Testament, and let the 30000 various Readings remain on an equal foot to the offence of many good persons? who will now as much despair of seeing it done, as they do of Mr. Whiston's * restoring the true text of the Old Testament; „ which, he says, has been „ greatly corrupted both in the *Hebrew & Septuagint* „ by the *Jews*, to make the reasonings of the Apostles „ from the Old Testament inconclusive & ridiculous.

DR. Bentley, certainly, ought to go on with his proposal; because the world will hardly take the Doctor's word, that in a Book, where most things are own'd to be of the greatest moment, there should be so many various Readings of no moment; tho one, or two, may be of that consequence, as to destroy the design of the whole book. In a prescription where there are ever so many wholesome drugs, yet if a poisonous one happens to be mix'd, it may turn the whole into rank poison. If the Doctrine of the *Trinity* is of the greatest moment, was not the Church highly concern'd to prevent various readings in that important point, as well as some forg'd texts?

HAD the Scripture been better guarded in many other matters of consequence, there could not have been so many texts seemingly clashing with one another. That there are such; is deny'd by none: Dr. Sear lays it down as certain, that † „ That opinion „ is false, or of little moment, that has but one, or „ two texts to countenance it; & that very dubious,

T 5- which

* Whiston's Essay pag 10.

† *Christ. Life*, P. 2. Vol. 1. Ch. 6. p. 384.

„ which has none but obscure texts to rely on; but
 „ when there are more, & much plainer texts against
 „ it than for it, it must be false.

AND another judicious Divine says, that * „ Our
 „ Faith is not to be built on single texts, because they
 „ may have been corrupted; tho' we have no ma-
 „ nuscript to point out to us, that the other manuscripts
 „ have been so corrupted in these passages. „ But,

IF we can't depend on single texts; & where there
 are several, the plainest are to carry it; the difficulty
 will be to know which are the plainest; since the
 different Sects of Christians have ever pretended, that
 the plainest texts are on their side, & wonder'd how
 their Adversaries cou'd mistake their meaning.

THE plain texts from St. *Austin's* days, at least in
 the *West*, were all in favour of *Predestination*; & upon
 tho'se plain texts the Articles of our most excellent
 Church, & all other *Protestant* Churches are founded.
 It's true in Q. *Elizabeth's* Reign, there were some
 few among the inferior Clergy for *Free-will*; † but
 then those *incorrigible Free-will Men*, as they were
 call'd, were, by the direction of the Bishops, sent to
 prison, there to live on hard labour, till they repented
 of their errors: But since the Court in *Charles I's* Reign,
 help'd to open the eyes of our Divines, they no longer
 blinded by their Articles clearly see, that all those plain
 texts (and what a number are muster'd up on both
 sides) are all for *Free-will*; against which, now, there
 are none but are look'd on as *incorrigible*.

B. THO' those Books, which contain the tradi-
 tional Religions of other Nations, have, notwith-
 standing all the care taken to prevent it, been mix'd
 with Fables & monstrous tales; yet we say, that the
 Scripture, especially the New Testament, tho' there
 are ever so many various readings, must needs be free
 from all errors of consequence; because that being
 design'd

* *G. Burnet's Answer to Lawes*, about Ch. Authority,
 pag. 114. † *Stroppe's Ann.* c. 17.

design'd by God for a plain, & unalterable Rule, for the actions of Mankind, cannot but be so guarded by Providence, as to hinder any mistakes of moment.

A. Your reasoning, I grant, holds good in relation to the Law of Nature, which equally obliges, at all times & places, the whole Race of Mankind; but then that depends not on the knowledge of any language dead, or living; or on the skill, or honesty of Transcribers, or Translators; but on that, which as it is apparent to the whole World, so it is not in the power of Mortals to alter; viz. the unchangeable Relation of Things, and the Duties resulting from thence.

„ * The Transcribers of books (as that learned & judicious Critick *Daillé* observes) „ have been guilty „ of innumerable mistakes; & that St. *Jerom* † (the most learned of the Fathers) complains, „ they wrote „ not what they found, but what they understood; „ and he gives instances of attempts made on the New Testament by the Orthodox themselves; particularly St. *Epiphanius*, for saying, ‡ „ that in the true, and „ most correct copies of St. *Luke*, it was writ, that *Jesus Christ wept*; & that this passage had been aliedg'd by St. *Ireneus*, but that the *Catholicks* had blotted out the word, fearing that the *Hereticks* might abuse it. The same St. *Jerom* says, the last twelve verses in the last Chapter of *Mark* were left out in most Greek Bibles; § *Omnibus Græcæ Libris pene hoc capitulum non habentibus*. *Grotius* imputes this omission to the Transcribers. But *Maldonat* will not allow of *Grotius*'s reason, because he says, *Luke* & *John* differ more with *Matthæw* than *Mark* does. ¶ *Major enim inter illos & Matthæum, quàm inter Matthæum & Marcum apparet repugnantia*.

Hilary,

* *De usu Patr. P. 1. l. 1. c. 3.* † *Epist. 28. ad Lucum. p. 247.*

‡ *L. 1. c. 4.* § *Epist. ad Hedib. Quest. 3. Grot. in loc. Maldonat. in loc.*

Hilary, speaking of Christ's bloody sweat, and the Angel sent to comfort him, says, * *Nec sane ignorandum nobis est, in Græcis & Latinis editionibus compluribus, de adveniente Angelo, vel de sudore sanguinis nihil scriptum reperiri.* This St. Jerom † seems to confirm.

For my part, I think, that at least, till we are extricated by Dr. Bentley's clue, the best way not to be mistaken, is to admit all for divine Scripture, that tends to the honour of God, and the good of Man; and nothing which does not. This clue, I think, will extricate the learned as well as unlearned out of many otherwise insuperable difficulties; and make the Laws of God, which way soever reveal'd, entirely to agree; & destroy that absurd notion of God's acting arbitrarily, and commanding for commanding-sake. And does not St. Paul ‡ suppose no Scripture to be divinely inspir'd, but *what is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness?* And if this be the test, ought we to admit any thing to be writ by inspiration, tho' it occurs ever so often in Scripture, till we are certain it will bear this test? And, indeed, was it otherwise, we should be in a sad condition, since there's scarce any opinion, tho' ever so absurd, or ridiculous, but has its vouchers, who quote texts on texts, for its support. Good Lord! what a load have the different parties laid on it, by their not observing this Rule? But,

Co'u'd we suppose any difference between *Natural* & *Traditional* Religion, to prefer the latter, wou'd be acting irrationally; as that Prophet did, who went contrary to what God had commanded § him by an immediate revelation, because a known Prophet assur'd him, he had afterwards a different revelation for him. A crime so heinous in the eyes of the Lord, that

* Hilary l. 10. de Trin. † Lib. 2. adver. Pelag.

‡ 2 Tim. 3. 16. See Grotius in loc. and the 5 Letters about Inspiration. pag. 100. Gr. Eng. Transl.
§ 1 Kings 13.

that he destroy'd this Prophet after a most signal manner; tho' he had to plead for himself, that the Prophet, who spoke to him in the name of the Lord, cou'd have no interest in deceiving him; & that there was nothing in the command; but might as well come from the Lord, as what himself had receiv'd. And 'tis worth observing, that the lying Prophet was so far from being punish'd, that the Lord continu'd to him the gift of Prophecy; nay, pronounc'd by his mouth the Doom of the Prophet, he so fatally deceiv'd.

B. WHY is this more worth observing than the case of *Abimelech*, who, upon both *Abraham's* & *Sarah's* lying to him, took *Sarah*, as the Lord himself owns, * *in the integrity of his heart*; & tho' he sent her back untouch'd, & gave considerable presents both to Wife and Husband, yet neither *he*, nor *his*, were to be pardon'd, till *Abraham* (the offending person) being a Prophet, was to pray for him; † *so Abraham pray'd unto God, & God heal'd Abimelech, and his Wife, and Maid-servants; and they bare Children*: And yet this holy Prophet was soon after guilty of a very barbarous action, in sending out ‡ *Hagar, whom Sarah had giv'n him to Wife, & his Son Ishmael, to perish in the wilderness*; for no other reason, but because *Sarah* had seen § *the Son of Hagar mocking*; and 'tis likely they had both perish'd, had not an Angel, calling out of Heaven, directed § *Hagar to a well of water*. And perhaps, the same Angel, who, when she before fled from *Sarah*, who * *had dealt hardly with her*, bid her * *return, and submit*: But in this last domestick quarrel, God himself miraculously interposes, & says, † *in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice*. But begging pardon for this interruption, pray go on.

A. WE; certainly, ought to adhere strictly to the Light of Nature; if, (as a Learned & Reverend Critick

* Gen. 20:6. † Ib. ver. 17. ‡ Id. 16:3. § Id. 21:9.
§ Gen. 21:19. * Id. 16:6. * Ib. ver. 9. † Id. 21:12.

tick observes)*. It must be allow'd by the judicious and impartial, that many corruptions are found in our present copies of the holy Bible; and that we have not now this blessed book in that perfection & integrity, that it was first written. It is alter'd in many places, & in some of the greatest moment. -- I could prove, I think, by undeniable and unavoidable instances, what Mr. Gregory of Oxford says in his Preface, to some critical notes on the Scripture, that he publish'd. There's no Author whatsoever says this learned Critick, that has suffer'd so much by the hand of time as the Bible has. If this, I say, must be allow'd, ought we not, in order to prevent all mistakes, in the first place to get clear ideas of the moral character of the Divine Being; and when by reasons much stronger than any drawn from human tradition, we have discover'd this character, ought we not to compare what we are told of him, by what we already know of him, and so judge of what Men teach us concerning God, by what God himself teaches us; for *we are all taught of him*. And then we shall be as certain, as there is a God perfectly wise, & infinitely good, that no doctrines can come from him that have not these characters stamp'd on them. Thus were there more false readings crept into the Scripture than these Divines suppose, yet we might still know our duty; and be certain that by doing our best to promote our mutual happiness, we answer the end of our creation; and that if we deviate from this rule for the sake of what depends on human tradition, we quit certainty for that, which is not pretended to amount to more than probability.

AND it is no small encouragement for us to observe this rule, since we find, that Men, if like Pedants, or School-Masters, they read books, not to examine the force & cogency of the arguments they meet with,

* Nyz: of Nat. and Rev. Relig. pag. 198, 199.

but for the sake of words & phrases, without considering the nature, reason, and tendency of things, understand very little of things. Have not great numbers from Age to Age, tho' Men of good natural parts, had their understandings confounded by thus unjudiciously employing them; & instead of clearing doubts increas'd them, and fill'd the world with useless criticisms, and trifling disputes? while they, who made words give place to things, & argu'd from the relation things bear to each other, have shewn themselves able *Casuists*, & enrich'd the World with most useful discourses, for promoting the honour of God, and the good of Man. And, therefore we are often caution'd by the best Authors, not to stick too close to the letter in reading the Scripture; since they say the style of Holy-writ is far from being exact; & that the laying too great stress on words, has been the occasion of most of the Disputes among Christians.

To shew how little we are to depend on words and phrases; they say, a number of Texts might be produc'd to prove *Moses* to be a God: „ For he is „ call'd * *God*, & *Lord*; and pray'd to, under that „ appellation, to forgive Sin †; has attributed to him „ the same miraculous work of bringing the Children „ of Israel out of Egypt, as is ascrib'd to God ‡; that „ the Israelites did believe in him, as well as in the „ Lord §, & were requir'd so to do; that he promis'd „ Rain in due season to such as kept his commandments ¶, „ and to *Jeshua*, that he wou'd be with him in carrying „ the People into Canaan ✕; altho' as a Man, he was „ to die before; that he did great works; yea, miracles „ in the sight of the Israelites, on purpose that they „ might know that he was the Lord their God *; that „ *Aaron* is said to be his Prophet †, which is proper

to
* *Exod.* 7. 1. *Id.* 4. 16. † *Núm.* 12. 11. *Exod.* 10. 16, 17.

‡ *Exod.* 32. 7. *Id.* 33. 1. § *Exod.* 14. ult. *Id.* 19. 9.

¶ *Deut.* 11. 13, 14, 15, &c. ✕ *Id.* 31. 23.

• *Deut.* 29. 5, 6. † *Exod.* 7. 1.

„ to the true God only; & in fine, that the *Israelites* „ were baptiz'd unto, or into Moses *.

THESE Authors tells us, that in the *Ethicks* of *Aristotle*, in the *Offices* of *Tully*, in the *Moral Treatises* of *Grotius*, *Puffendorff*, &c. the nature & reason of our duties, the connexion between them, & the dependence they have on one another are plainly seen, but in the Scripture, things, *say they*, are not generally so treated, as that Men may precisely know the nature, & extent of their duty. Are they not, *say they*, for the most part, deliver'd in such a general, undetermin'd, nay, sometimes parabolical, and hyperbolical manner, as did we not consult our Reason, & learn our duty from thence, the letter might lead us wrong: nay, the Apostle himself says, *the Letter kills*.

B. I can't believe things of any moment are thus represented, because, as God could have no other end in giving us a Revelation, than the rightly directing our minds, so that end could not have been answer'd, except it was deliver'd in a way most plain, & easy to be understood in all times & places; for if there are propositions in Scripture, which naturally tend to mislead us, or if the use of languages is perverted in some instances, how can we certain, but it may be in others?

A. Is not the New Testament full of Parables, nay is it not said, † that *without a Parable Jesus spake not to the multitude*; and for this remarkable reason, ‡ *That seeing they might see, & not perceive, and hearing they might hear, and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, & their sins be forgiven them*. Is not St. *John's* Gospel, for the most part, writ after an obscure, allegoricall manner, especially in relation to the Person of Christ? And do not Commentators own we labour under much the same difficulties in interpreting St. *Paul*? The honourable Mr. *Boyle* says „ *That*

* 1 Cor. 10. 1, 2. † Mat. 13. 34. ‡ Mark 4. 12.

* That sometimes in St. Paul's writings many passages are so penn'd, as to contain a tacit kind of a dialogue; and that unskilfully by Readers, & even Interpreters, taken for an argument, which, indeed, is an objection. It's said it was the way of the East, to make use of dark, & involv'd sentences, figurative & parabolical discourses, abrupt, and maim'd ways of expressing themselves, with a neglect of annexing transitions.

As for hyperbolical expressions, it was customary among the Eastern nations to express themselves after a most pompous, & high-strain'd manner. This way of speaking was a main part of Learning, taught in the Schools of the Prophets among the Jews; and happy was he, who cou'd most excel in this elevated, romantick way; & both the Old & New Testament abound with expressions of this nature. *Isaiah*, in prophesying the destruction of *Babylon*, says, † *The Stars of Heaven shall not give their light, the Sun shall be darkned.* -- ‡ *I will shake the Heavens, & the Earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, & in the day of his fierce anger.* And the destruction of the City of *Jerusalem* in the New Testament is describ'd after such a manner, as if Nature was unbind'd, & the Universe dissolving.

Bp. Fleetwood on *Psalms* 18. says, § „ That without remembering *David's* history, one wou'd imagine Heaven & Earth were mov'd on his behalf; and that the course of Nature had been overthrow'n, & his life cover'd by continual miracles: „ And he there observes, that the Jewish expressions, & the expressions of all people that dwelt eastward are full of pomp, & amplification of fancy & hyperbole. „ And, I think, under this head we may reckon these texts, that ¶ *All the Kings of the Earth* fought.

V

* *Boyle's* Style of Script. p. 64. † *Isa.* 13. 10. ‡ *ib.* ver. 13.

§ *Thanksgiv. Sermon. June 7. 1716.*

¶ *2 Chron.* 9. 23.

sought the presence of Solomon. That * If the things which Jesus did were written, the World itself could not contain the books. And are not most of the expressions of St. John as figurative, as *Eating the Flesh, & drinking the Blood of the Son of Man*? And what monstrous practices did those words, taken literally, produce, even in the primitive times; & what senseless disputes since? And,

MUST we not put under this head a number of other texts, † *Whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do.* ‡ *If two of you shall agree on Earth, touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father, which is in Heaven.* § *If you have Faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall remove mountains, & nothing shall be impossible to you.* ¶ *And you may say to this Sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the roots, & be thou planted in the Sea, & it shall obey you.* ✕ *Whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven.* * *He that is spiritual, judgeth all things, (which the Papists say is the Pope) yet he himself is judg'd of no Man.* † *Things present, & things to come, all are yours.* ‡ *St. John's little Children are said to have an unction, & to know all things.* And what more could be said of the Anointed, or Christ himself? Men are bid to be § *partakers of the divine nature;* and to be as ¶ *perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect.* What blessings are not Christians promis'd, even in this life? Is it not said, ✕ *Christ has made us Kings & Priests unto God;* -- * *& we shall reign on the Earth?* And are not the † *Meek to inherit the Earth?* And, is not ‡ *every one that hath forsaken houses, or Brethren, or Sisters, or Father, or Mother, or Wife, or Children, or Lands, for my name sake, to receive an hundred fold, & to inherit everlasting life?* What one is sent to de-

clare

* John 21. 25. † Id. 14. 13. ‡ Mat. 18. 19. § Id. 17. 20.
¶ Luke 17. 6. ✕ Mat. 16. 12. * Cor. 2. 12. † Ib. 3. 22.
‡ 1 John 2. 20. § 2 Pet. 1. 4. ¶ Mat. 5. 48.
✕ Rev. 1. 6. * Ib. 5. 10. † Mat. 5. 5. ‡ Ib. 19. 29.

claire is to be done, that he is said to do: So *Jeremiah* is said to be * *set over the Nations, & over the Kingdoms, to root out, pull down, & destroy.* What is design'd to be done, shall be said to be actually done: As † *the Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World.* ‡ *Before Abraham was I was;* or as we (to make it more mysterious) render it, *I am:* § *Nay, a Creature not born long before, is said to be the First-born of every Creature.* Advice is call'd Submission, Subjection, & Obedience; ¶ *Ye younger submit yourselves to the elder; yea, be subject to one another.* ✕ *Obey them that have the rule over you; and submit yourselves.* Persuasion is call'd compulsion, as * *Compel them to come in.* And what rooting work have not the *Papists* made from this text; † *Every plant my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up;* and such other misapply'd places? Is not God's permitting evil, call'd doing it? ‡ *Shall there be evil in a City, & the Lord has not done it?* Nay, is not the Lord said to § *have created evil?* And to have harden'd *Mens hearts;* and then to punish them for their being harden'd? And to tempt *Men?* Are we not to pray against God's leading us into temptation? Nay, is not God, if the words are to be taken literally, represented as an arbitrary Being, ¶ *having Children not yet born, neither having done any good, or evil:* ✕ *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* -- * *Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, & whom he will he hardeneth.* † *Hath not the Potter power over his clay?* --

ARE not things in Scripture absolutely condemn'd, which are only so conditionally: As the *Jewish Rites* & *Sacrifices* are, in the *Old Testament*, represented as † *an iniquity, & an abomination to the Lord.* Things

V 2

com-

* *Jer. 1. 10.* † *Rev. 13. 8.* ‡ *John 8. 58.* § *Col. 1. 15.*

¶ *1 Pet. 5. 5.* ✕ *Heb. 13. 17.* * *Luke 14. 23.*

† *Mat. 15. 13.* ‡ *Amos 3. 6.* § *Isaiah 45. 7.*

¶ *Rom. 9. 11.* ✕ *ib. ver. 13.* * *ib. ver. 18.* † *Ver. 21.*

‡ *Isaiah 1. 13.*

commanded are positively said not to be commanded;
** As I spake not to your Fathers, nor commanded them
 in that day. I brought them out of the Land of Egypt,
 concerning Burnt-offerings & Sacrifices. What can be
 more figurative than Jesus's saying, † If any Man come
 to me, & hate not his Father, & Mother, & Wife, and
 Children, & Brethren, & Sisters; yea, and his own life
 also, he can't be my Disciple. Things spoken in an un-
 limited, are to be taken in a restrained sense: ‡ Swear
 not at all. § Children & Servants, obey your Parents
 & Masters in all things. ¶ The love of money, is the root
 of all evil. ✠ Whatsoever the Pharisees bid you do,
 that do, & observe. * Rejoice evermore. Pray without
 ceasing. Prove all things. And sometimes a short dura-
 tion is express'd by the words for ever; or for ever-
 lasting; or for the end of the World: So Jonah, after
 he came out of the Fish's Belly, says, † The Earth
 with her bars was about me for ever, & an hundred
 other such texts: So that whether any duration is to
 be everlasting, (in the sense we take that word)
 can't be known from the words of Scripture; but it
 must be judg'd of from the nature of the things that
 are said thus to endure. But,*

WHAT can be more surprising, than Christ's de-
 claring in most express terms, he came to do that,
 which we must suppose he came to hinder: *Think not,*
(says he) † I am come to send Peace; I come not to
send Peace, but a Sword. For I am come to set a Man
at variance with his Father, &c. And, § Suppose ye,
I am come to give peace on Earth, I tell you nay; but
rather division. And again, ¶ I am come to send fire
on Earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled?
 And has not that fire burnt outrageously ever since,
 being blown up by those, whose business it was to
 have extinguish'd it? And have they not so acted as
 if

* Jer. 7. 22. † Luke 14. 26. ‡ Mat. 5. 34. § Eph. 6. 1. 5.
 ¶ 1 Tim. 6. 10. ✠ Mat. 23. 3. * 1 Thes. 5. 16, 17, 21.
 † Jonah 2. 6. ‡ Mat. 10. 34. § Luke 12. 51. ¶ 1b. Ver. 49.

if this was a prophetick saying, they were at all times bound to see fulfill'd, tho' to the destruction of all moral duties whatever?

ANOTHER difficulty in understanding both the Old and New Testament, is, that most things, tho' owing to second causes, are referr'd immediately to God. In the New Testament, *Pilate* is said * to have his power from above, even while he was condemning *Jesus*. And † there is no power but of God, the Powers that be, are ordain'd of God: ‡ Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, & to all the Flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers. Nay, every good motion is imputed to the Spirit, whether with, or without understanding. § I will pray with the Spirit, & with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and with the Understanding also. Or, if a Man talk'd in an unknown tongue, & cou'd not interpret what he said; or any of the congregation understood him; yet it was Prophefying, & the gift of the Spirit. And St. Paul calls a Heathen Poet a Prophet. And is not Spirit, nay, the Spirit of God, ¶ taken, at least, in twenty different senses in the Scripture?

In short, the words of Scripture, on which things of the greatest consequence depend, are, as is shewn by a learned Author, ✕ sometimes taken, not only in a different, but contrary sense. However, to give one instance, *Nature* in Rom. 2. 14. & *Nature* in Eph. 2. 3. if rightly translated, are taken in opposite senses, and that word in 1 Cor. 11. 14. is taken in a sense different from both.

How can we know from Scripture, what things are owing immediately to God, or to second causes; since every thing that was thought to be good, not only the powers & faculties of Mens minds, but voluntary actions themselves, are immediately ascrib'd

V. 3 to

* *Jehn* 19. 11. † *Rom.* 13. 1. ‡ *Acts* 20. 28. § 1 *Cor.* 14. 15.

¶ See Tractat. Theol. Polit. pag. 14. &c.

✕ *Stapleton* of Cantrov. l. 4. c. 10.

to God. For instance, Bezaleel is said to be ** fill'd with the Spirit of God in wisdom, & understanding*, because he cou'd devise cunning works of gold, & silver, &c. And the Prophet *Isaiah*, after he had describ'd the whole art of plowing & sowing, says of the plowman, *† His God does instruct him to discretion, & teach him.*— And speaking of the art of threshing, he says, *‡ This also comes from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, & excellent in working.* Can the Clergy have a better pretence to a *Jure-divino*-ship, than the Plowman and Thresher? Where is it said of them, that their God instructs them to discretion, & teaches them? Or, that their art comes from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, & excellent in working?

As some things are immediately referr'd to God, so others are as immediately referr'd to Satan; § nay, the same action is imputed both to God and Satan. These few, among numberless instances, I mention, to shew, that the Scripture supposes, that from our Reason we have such infallible tests, to judge what is the Will of God, that we are safe from being misled by any expressions of this nature.

B. SURELY, the moral Precepts deliver'd by our Saviour, are not express'd thus obscurely.

A. THESE, no doubt, are the plainest; yet even these, generally speaking, are not to be taken in their obvious & literal meaning: As for instance, ¶ *Lend, hoping for nothing again.* ✠ *He that takes away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.* * *Of him, who takes thy goods, ask them not again.* And shou'd we not, without having recourse to the Reason of things, be apt to think, that the Poor, as such, were the only favourites of Heaven: † *Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.* Blessed are ye that hunger, for ye shall be filled. And shou'd we not likewise be apt to

° *Exod. 31. 3, 4* † *Isaiah 28. 26.* ‡ *Ibid. ver. 29.*

§ *2 Sam. 24. 1 Chron. 21.* ¶ *Luke 6. 35.*

* *Mat. 5. 40.* ✠ *Luke 6. 30.* † *Ib. 6. 20, 21.*

imagine, that the Gospel was an enemy to the Rich as such; & consequently, to all those methods which make a Nation rich: As, * *Woe unto you rich, for you have receiv'd your consolation.* † *It is easier for a Camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God.* And that no Man might be rich, it was a general precept, ‡ *Sell what ye have, & give alms:* Nay, the Woman that cast into the treasury her two mites is commended, because she cast in § *all she had, even all her living.* And to shew that none were exempt from this precept, Jesus says to the Man, who § *had observ'd all the precepts from his youth, One thing thou lackest, sell whatsoever thou hast, & give to the Poor.* This precept is impracticable in a Christian State, because there cou'd be no buyers where all were to be sellers; & so is a community of goods, tho' in use among the *Essenes*, & the Christians at first.

'Tis certain, that such passages, as ✕ *Blessed are they that mourn;* * *Blessed are ye that weep;* † *Woe unto you that laugh now, ye shall mourn, & weep.* And other texts about ‡ *self-denial, and taking up the cross,* and *Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink.* § *Take no thought for the morrow,* ¶ *Consider the ravens, for they neither sow, nor reap.* -- ✕ *Consider the lillies, how they grow, they toil not, they spin not, and yet, I say, Solomon, in all his glory, was not array'd like one of these.* 'Tis certain, I say, that such like texts have, by being interpreted literally, run Men into monstrous absurdities?

FROM this text, * *Resist not evil, but whoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,* and some others of the like nature, not only the primitive

V 4

- * Luke 24. † Ibid. 18. 25. ‡ Ibid. 12. 33.
§ Mark 12. 44. ¶ Ibid. 10. 21. ✕ Mat. 5. 4.
* Luke 6. 21. † Ib. ver. 25. ‡ Mat. 6. 25. § Ib. ver. 34.
§ Luke 11. 24. ✕ Ib. ver. 27. ¶ Mat. 5. 39.

mitive Fathers, but a considerable Sect, even now among the *Protestants*, think all self-defense unlawful.

From these sayings of our Saviour, * *There are some Eunuchs, which were so born from their Mothers womb, and there are some Eunuchs, which were made Eunuchs of Men, & there be Eunuchs, which have made themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake*; the primitive Fathers, who thought they ought not to put a different meaning on the word *Eunuch* in the latter end of the verse, from what it had twice before, believ'd it a piece of heroick virtue for Men to castrate themselves: And tho' by the *Roman Law*, no one cou'd be castrated without leave of the President, as *Justin* observes; † yet he commends a Youth, who perform'd this operation on himself without it. And you know, that the Bishop of *Alexandria* highly approv'd this action in *Origen*, as an instance of heroick virtue, tho' afterwards, when he became his capital Enemy, he as much condemn'd it. Do not these things sufficiently shew, that we must not deviate one tittle from what our Reason dictates in any of these important points. Nay, even the Precept of ‡ *forgiving injuries, not only seven, but seventy times seven*, except interpreted consistently with what the light of Nature dictates to be our duty, in preserving our reputation, liberty, & property, & in doing all we can in our several stations, to hinder all injury & injustice from others, as well as ourselves, wou'd be a Doctrine attended with fatal consequences: So that the expediency, or even lawfulness of forgiving injuries, depends on such circumstances as human discretion is to judge of.

As I am a member of the Common-wealth, I can't be a Judge in my own cause, and tho' I may legally prosecute a Man who has injur'd me, yet if the injury be but slight, & by my over-looking it, he may become my Friend, common prudence will oblige me

* *Mat. 19. 12.* † *Apoc. 13. 17.* ‡ *Mat. 18. 22.*

me to forgive him: But, if he, taking advantage of my good nature, injures me the more, & more frequently, because he may do it with impunity; the Precept of *forgiving*, tho' it forbids me to punish for punishment-sake, does no more in this case bar me of a legal remedy, than it does Nations of resenting national injuries: And all good Governments oblige people, for the sake of the common good, to prosecute those who have injur'd them by robbing, stealing, or any other ways cheating, or defrauding them. So that 'tis the Reason of things, which, in all circumstances, must determine us how to act; & consequently, when this Precept is truly stated, there is nothing new in it: But if it be not truly stated, it is such a new doctrine, as may be attended with fatal consequences.

Celsus, says, * that „the Doctrine of *forgiving injuries*, was not peculiar to the Christians, tho' they „taught it after a grosser manner.„ And *Confucius* thus expresses this doctrine, † „Acknowledge thy „benefits by the return of benefits; but never revenge „injuries.

B. *Confucius*, tho' he forbids the revenging injuries, yet he did not carry things to that state of perfection, as to teach the *loving our Enemies*; but on the contrary maintains, ‡ „We may have an aversion for „an Enemy without desiring revenge, the motions „of Nature are not always criminal; § & 'tis only „the good Man, who can love, & hate with reason.

A. ARE not the passions of love & hatred given us by God, to be exercis'd on proper objects? Actions, abstractedly consider'd, are not the objects of love and hate, but persons for the sake of their actions; and are not the actions of some Men too detestable to create in us any sentiments, but of aversion; so as to oblige us to bring them to condign punishment?

V 5

Nay,

* *Origines contra Celsum*. l. 7. p. 373.

† *Max.* 23. in the translated *Morals of Confucius*.

‡ *Max.* 63. § *Max.* 15.

Nay, must we not learn to hate ourselves, before we can learn to love those that hate us?

IF we ought not, nay cannot love the Devil, because our Enemy, how can we love those Devils incarnate, those Enemies of God & Men, who hate, & persecute Men for shewing their love to God, in following the dictates of Conscience? If love carries with it complaisance, esteem, & friendship, & these are due to all Men, what distinction can we then make between the best, & worst of Men? Tho' God, it's true, makes the *Sun to shine*, and the *rain to fall on the evil, & the good*; and, indeed, how cou'd it be otherwise in the present state of things? yet, certainly, he does not love evil Men, tho' he bears with them for a time.

I am so far from thinking the Maxims of *Confucius*, and Jesus Christ to differ; that I think the plain and simple Maxims of the former, will help to illustrate the more obscure ones of the latter, accommodated to the then way of speaking. Our Saviour's saying, * *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour, & hate thine Enemy*; Divines have, in vain, puzzl'd themselves to find out that text in the Old Law; for cou'd they find it as they do other texts, that our Saviour in the same chapter, by this way of speaking, refers to, it wou'd only shew, that the Divine precepts were not consistent with one another. Indeed, St. Paul says, † *If thy Enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head*: ‡ But treating him thus, can't sure be an argument of love; since 'tis in order to have divine vengeance fall on his head.

B. COMMENTATORS agree, that these Precepts of our Saviour are not to be taken in the plain, obvious, & grammatical meaning of the words, but are to be so explain'd, limited, and restrain'd, as best serve to promote human happiness.

* *Mat.* 5. 43.

† *Rom.* 12. 20.

‡ *Psal.* 118. 8. 13. 120. 4. 140. 10.

A. SUPPOSE those Precepts are capable of being thus paraphras'd, yet how do we know this was the design of the Preacher? The *Essenes* (a Sect our Saviour never found fault with) had, as is plain from *Philo* & *Josephus*, rules much the same, which they interpreted according to the plain & literal meaning, and the Christians, as I shall shew hereafter, for some Centuries, understood most of these Precepts after the same manner, believing that the nature of moral rules requir'd they should be thus interpreted, especially such as are design'd to govern the actions of the most ignorant and illiterate, and taught too by a person, whose infinite knowledge must enable him so to express himself, as that his words should not be liable to the least misconstruction.

B. HOWEVER, Christians at first depending on the grammatical, & obvious meaning of the words, might mistake, yet Reason taught them afterwards how they were to be interpreted.

A. REASON, then, must be our Guide, and we must know our duty from the Light of Nature, antecedently to those Precepts, otherwise we cou'd never know it was our duty to put such senses on words, as they otherwise seem not to bear. Besides,

SHOUL'D not Rules concerning Morality, be suited to Mens particular circumstances, plainly describing that conduct which they require? Is not this the design of the Municipal Laws in every Country? What Benefit cou'd Subjects have, from Laws written in such a loose, general, and undetermin'd manner; as *Lend, hoping for nothing again, If any Man will sue thee at Law, & take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also: Of him who takes away thy goods, ask them not again;* or those other texts, which seem to condemn the Rich as such, & require, not the setting the poor at work, but the *selling all, & giving to the poor,* or those other Precepts, which seem to forbid *self-defence*, or require us to *take no thought for our life,*

or

or for *the morrow*? And that too by arguments drawn from *Lillies, neither sowing, nor spinning*? The same may be said of all general, & undetermin'd Rules in the New Testament, tho' more plainly deliver'd: As for instance, tho' tis said, * *Servants, obey your Masters in all things*; & † *please them well in all things*; yet is the measure of obedience due from Servants to Masters any otherwise to be learnt, than from the agreement of the parties, or the custom of the Country? 'Tis said, *We are to render to Cæsar, the things that are Cæsar's*; but must we not learn from the Laws in every Nation, who is *Cæsar*? And what is his due? Otherwise we should act like those wicked Priests, who, not long since, from general words of *obedience*, would have destroy'd our happy Constitution, and treacherously invested the Prince with an absolute power. We are to *render all Men their dues*; but what those dues are, we are to learn from the Reason of things, & the Laws of the Country.

In a word, 'tis the tendency of actions, which makes them either good or bad; they that tend to promote human happiness are always good, & those that have a contrary tendency are always bad. And 'tis the circumstances Men are under, by which we are to judge of the tendency of actions. As for instance, the killing a Man, consider'd without its circumstances, is an action, neither good or bad; but by the Magistrate, when the publick good requires it, or by a private Man, when necessary for self-defence, is an Action always good: But done when the publick good does not require it, when there is no such danger, & with malice prepense, 'tis always evil. Taking up arms against a person entrusted with the protection of the Common-Wealth, can't be determin'd to be good, or bad, without considering circumstances; if he has not abus'd his trust, it will be Rebellion, the highest of crimes, but if he has betray'd that trust, & oppress'd the

* Col. 3. 22. † Titus 2. 9.

the Community, then a just and necessary defence. Injoying a Woman, or lusting after her, can't be said, without considering the circumstances, to be either good, or evil; that warm desire, which is implanted in human-nature, can't be criminal, when persu'd after such a manner, as tends most to promote the happiness of the parties, & to propagate & preserve the species. What we call *Intest*, is now for many good reasons not to be allow'd of, yet it was a duty in the Children of *Adam & Eve*: And if the nearest of kin were now thrown on a desert Island, I see no reason, but that they might act as the first-born pair did.

THO' there were ever so many texts in the New as well as Old Testament against usury, & those too back'd by the unanimous authority of all the Fathers, yet the forbidding it, especially in trading Nations, would now be immoral, since without it industry would in a great measure be discourag'd, arts unimprov'd, and trade & commerce, consisting chiefly in credit, destroy'd: Besides, what reason can be assign'd, why a Man should any more lend his money, than let his lands for nothing. And even that common rule of doing as we would be done unto, supposes an action fit to be done, or at least, without any ill tendency. Nay, to go a little further, was not the Command of *abstaining from blood*, given after the Deluge to the then whole race of Mankind, & often repeated in the Law? And in the New Testament, is not this same Precept enjoin'd the *Gentile* Converts, by the unanimous Decree of the Apostles, & by the Holy Ghost too, as necessary; nay, equally so with the abstaining from fornication; and thought by all Christians, for many Ages, to be of perpetual obligation? yet who is now so ridiculous, as out of Religion to abstain from black-puddings? Who now, to give another instance, thinks it a duty to wash his neighbour's feet? tho' a thing, not only commanded by a dying Saviour, after the most solemn manner,

&

& under no less penalty than *having no part in him*; but enforc'd, & inculcated by his own example. Our Saviour commands Men * *not to swear at all*; and St. James impresses the same precepts, by saying, † *Above all things, swear not*; and by the manner of its being introduc'd by our Saviour, it seems chiefly to relate to oaths taken on solemn occasions; ‡ *it is said of old, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, swear not at all.*—And yet, who now, besides Quakers, refuse to swear at all? By these, you see, tho' several other instances might be produc'd, how Christians have, in the main, taken the tendency of actions to be the rule, to judge of their lawfulness or unlawfulness, goodness or badness: And in those few things Superstition has made them judge otherwise, has it not always been to their Prejudice?

B. Is there no exception to this Rule? Must not Men, at all times, make their words & thoughts agree; and never speak, but just as they think?

A. THE Rule I have laid down holds even here; for tho' speech was given Men to communicate their thoughts, and 'tis generally for their common good, that Men shou'd speak as they think; yet this common good prescribes certain restrictions. Deceiving an Enemy in a just War, either by words or actions, if it tends to bring about the end of War, Peace, is certainly a duty: And the same reason obliges people not to keep those promises, tho' sworn to, which they have been forc'd to make to Robbers and Thieves: And some go so far, as to think, that those who wou'd force others to declare their opinions, to their own prejudice, in such matters where the Government has no concern, have no more right to truth than Robbers, & other publick Enemies.

FRIENDSHIP will sometimes oblige Men to deceive people, when it manifestly tends to their good,

* Mat. 5. 34. † James 5. 12. ‡ Mat. 5. 33, 34.

& none are prejudic'd by it; and all praise it with relation to Children, sick people, & Men in passion. Must he not be an ill Man, indeed, who would not save an innocent person, by telling his pursuer a falsehood? This is a duty he owes to both, the pursuer & pers'u'd. And if Men, (as none scruple it) may bid their Servants say, *They are not at home*; & do several other things of this nature, why may they not, when silence will be interpreted to their prejudice, deceive impertinent people, in such matters where they have no concern? Thus, you see, there are certain exceptions to this Rule, which, as well as the Rule itself, are built on the good of Mankind; and yet these exceptions will by no means justify mental reservations, or equivocations.

THE Children of *Israel*, in the time of the Judges, were certainly none of the best *Casuists*; who, when in a quarrel, (the oddest that ever was) having * *sworn before the Lord at Mizpah, not to give any of their Daughters to wife to Benjamin*; and, in pursuance of this quarrel, *destroy'd them with their Wives & Children, except 600, who escap'd by flying to a cave*; and then reflecting that a whole Tribe would be lost, if they did not give them Wives; and their oaths, accompany'd with a curse, violated, if they did; found out these two expedients: The Men of *Jabesh Gilead*, not concerning themselves in this quarrel, † *not coming to the general Assembly, they destroy'd with their Wives & Children, except 400 Virgins*; ‡ *whom they gave for Wives to these Benjamites*; but these not being a sufficient number, they advis'd, nay, § *commanded them, to seize on some of their Daughters as they were dancing, & to carry them off*: Thus these merciful, & religious People preserv'd their Oaths, and their Brother *Benjamin*.

B.

* *Judges 21. 1.* † *Ibid. ver. 8.*
‡ *Ibid. ver. 12.* § *Ibid. ver. 20, 21.*

B. THE Hebrew Midwives, no doubt, acted according to your Rule in deceiving Pharaoh, by not destroying the Hebrew male-children; because they said, * *They feared God, & God dealt well with them, & made them houses*; but there's another precedent in the same history, which seems very surprising: The Lord, tho' he told Moses, † and the Elders of Israel, his real design of bringing his People out of Egypt into the Land of the Canaanites; ‡ yet bids them say to the King of Egypt, § *Let us go three days journey into the Wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with Pestilence, or with the Sword*: ¶ *We can't sacrifice in the Land, for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians*; ✕ *Our Cattle must go with us, for thereof we must serve the Lord*. And at last, when Pharaoh, whose heart God had frequently harden'd, comply'd with their request, he bids them go * *serve the Lord, as ye have said*; and upon this occasion, they borrow'd of the Egyptians, as the Lord order'd them, † *Jewels of Gold & Silver, & raiment*, even to the spoiling of them; and when Pharaoh (who all along seem'd jealous of their design, & bids them ‡ *not go far away*) found that this solemn Sacrifice was a meer pretence, & that they really fled with all they had borrow'd of his people, he periu'd the fugitives, the consequence was, that the Egyptians, instead of obtaining restitution, were miraculously destroy'd, & Pharaoh lost his life as well as his Subjects, & those who had dealt thus treacherously with them, were as miraculously preserv'd.

A. As to this point, I can only advise you to consult our learned Commentators, who will satisfy you in this matter, as well as why the § *Terror of the Lord* hinder'd justice to be done upon the two Sons of Jacob, for the vilest piece of cruelty and treachery, they

* Exod. 1. 17. 20, 21. † Ibid. 3. 8. ‡ Ib. ver. 18.
§ Exod. 5. 3. ¶ Ib. 8. 26. ✕ Ib. 10. 26. * Ib. 12. 31.
† Exod. 12. 35, 36. ‡ Ib. 8. 23. § Gen. 35. 5.

they committed on the *Sethemites*. But not to meddle with things foreign to our purpose,

I will venture to say, that this Rule of acting according as the circumstances we are under, point out to us, to be for the general good, is a Rule without exception; whereas all other general Rules are of little use, when apply'd to particular cases; because of the many exceptions to them, founded on other Rules, equally general: And further, that this universal, & unexceptionable Rule is highly necessary, in explaining all the Precepts of our Saviour; especially those relating to *loving of Enemies, & forgiving Injuries*. And the rather, because

THE Ecclesiasticks, tho' they cry up the Precepts of Mens *loving their own Enemies*, yet they effectually evade this, and all other moral Precepts, by telling them 'tis their duty to *bare God's Enemies*; (and those to be sere, are God's Enemies, who refuse blindly to submit to their dictates, especially in matters relating to their power and profit:) And have also found out many ways of making the Precept of forgiving injuries useless, more particularly by telling Men, that 'tis for the correction of manners, for the good of their own, as well as their neighbours souls, that the *Spiritual Courts* are erected, where People, for such hasty & angry words, as no action (there being no real damage) will lye for at *Common Law*, are to be censur'd: And thus numbers of ordinary people are, on this pretence, to the great benefit of those Courts, frequently undone; and spiteful persons gratify their malice, without any satisfaction, but that of ruining their Neighbours, & very often themselves.

I might shew you, in support of my never-failing Rule of judging of actions by their tendency, that we are carefully to distinguish between the actions of Jesus himself; since in some (these being no otherwise to be accounted for) he; as Divines themselves, own, acted by virtue of his prophetic office; these,

consequently, can be no precedent for us; but of this hereafter.

B. You have already, I must own, taken a great deal of pains, to shew, that God, in creating Mankind, had no other design than their happiness, and that all the Rules he gave them (it being repugnant to his nature to have any arbitrary commands) could have no other tendency; and that by making them moral Agents, he made them capable of knowing wherein their happiness consists, or in other words, of discovering whatever the relations they stand in to God, and their fellow-creatures make fit to be observ'd. And from thence you conclude, Mens happiness, at one time as well as another, consisting in the same things, that the Gospel (which can make no alteration in the relations Men stand in to God, and one another, or the duties that flow from thence,) could only be a Republication, or Restoration of that Religion, which is founded on the eternal Reason of things: which, you suppose, is what we are still govern'd by; since we are oblig'd to recede from the *Letter*, tho' the words are ever so plain, if that recedes from the Reason of things, as all own the *Letter* does, in innumerable places relating to God himself; by imputing human parts, human infirmities, & human passions, even of the worst kind, to him; & making those the cause of many of his actions: And that as in the Old Testament there are several things, either commanded, or approv'd, which wou'd be criminal in us to observe, because we can't reconcile our doing them with the Reason of things, so in the New Testament, its Precepts are for the most part deliver'd either so hyperbolically, that they wou'd lead Men astray, were they govern'd by the usual meaning of words; or else express'd in so loose, general, & undetermin'd a manner, that Men are as much left to be govern'd by the Reason of things, as if there were no such Precepts: And the Scripture not distinguishing be-

between those Precepts which are occasional, & those which are not, we have no way to distinguish them, but from the Nature of things; which will point out to us those Rules, which eternally oblige, whether deliver'd in Scripture, or not. These sentiments you so strongly enforce, that I shou'd find it difficult not to yield, had I not so able a Combatant as Dr. S. Clark, for my Second; who, in his excellent *Discourse of the unalterable obligation of Natural Religion, & the truth, and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, not only shews, that they are distinct Religions, but the infinite advantage the latter has above the former: And tho' this good, as well as great Man is dead, whereby the Church has sustain'd an irreparable loss, yet he will for ever live in this immortal Work.

CHAP. XIV.

Dr. CLARK's Discourse of The unchangeable Obligation of Natural Religion, and the Truth, & Certainty of the Christian Revelation, consider'd; and from thence is shewn, how inconsistent forever with the design of that Discourse, that nothing can be a part of Religion, but what is founded on the Nature, and Reason of Things.

4. I Own, the Dr. got immortal honour by that Discourse; how 'tis admir'd, the seventh Edition shews: And we may well imagine, an Author, who usually exhausts the subject he writes on, has here omitted nothing that makes for his purpose. And, therefore, since 'tis your pleasure, I will fully consider this Discourse, & begin with the Character he gives of the *Law of Nature*; and see whether he does not re-

present it so absolutely perfect, as to take in every thing that God requires of Mankind: And then examine what he says in behalf of Revelation, in contradistinction to the Religion of Nature.

THE Dr. not only maintains, that * ,, the Law of Nature is eternal, universal, and absolutely unchangeable; ,, but has two Sections to prove, ,, † that the *Will of God* always determines itself to act according to the eternal *Reason of Things*, ‡ & that all *rational Creatures* are oblig'd to govern themselves in all their actions by the same eternal Rule of Reason; ,, which supposes, that all rational Creatures are not only capable of knowing this eternal Rule of Reason, but likewise of knowing there can be no other Rule, for the actions both of God & Man. In his previous Discourse of the *Being of a God*, he affirms, that § ,, They, who are not govern'd by this Law, are for setting up their own unreasonable self-will, in opposition to the Nature, and Reason of things. — acting contrary to their own Reason & knowledge, attempting to destroy that order, by which the Universe subsists; and by consequence, offering the highest affront imaginable to the Creator of all things, who himself governs all his actions by these Rules, & cannot but require the same of all his reasonable Creatures. ,, And in this Discourse he says, ¶ ,, The All-powerful Creator, & Governour of the Universe, who has the absolute, & uncontrollable dominion of all things in his own hands, and is accountable to none for what he does, yet thinks it no diminution of his power, to make this *Reason of things* the unalterable Rule, & Law of all his own actions in the government of the world, and does nothing by mere will and arbitrariness. ,, And indeed, if God does nothing by mere will and arbitrariness, tis impossible there can be any other Rule but

* Edit. 4. pag. 82. † Pag. 47. ‡ Pag. 48.
§ Pag. 131. ¶ Pag. 49.

but the Reason of things. And accordingly he says,
 „ * The eternal & unchangeable Nature, & Reason
 „ of the Things themselves are the Law of God,
 „ not only to his Creatures, but also to himself, as
 „ being the Rule of his own actions in the govern-
 „ ment of the world., † „ And, as a learned Prelate
 „ of our own has excellently shewn, not barely his
 „ infinite Power, but the Rules of this eternal Law,
 „ are the true foundation, and the measure of his
 „ dominion over his Creatures. Now, for the same
 „ reason, that God, who hath no Superior to determine
 „ him, yet constantly directs all his own actions by
 „ the eternal Rule of Justice and Goodness; 'tis evi-
 „ dent all *intelligent Creatures* in their several spheres
 „ and proportions, *ought* to obey the same Rule ac-
 „ cording to the Law of their nature., Which is
 „ supposing it wou'd be Tyranny in God to have any
 „ arbitrary Commands, or give Man any other Rules,
 „ but the Rules of this eternal Law, the *true foundation,*
 „ & *measure of his dominion over his Creatures.* And again,
 „ ‡ God, who is infinitely self-sufficient to his own
 „ happiness, cou'd have no motive to create things
 „ at all, but only that he might communicate to them
 „ his goodness & happiness., If so, they, who do
 „ all the good they can to themselves, & Fellow-cra-
 „ tures, answer the end of their creation. § „ And,
 „ he says, that in matters of natural Reason & Mo-
 „ rality, that which is holy & good is not therefore
 „ holy & good, because it is commanded to be done,
 „ but it is therefore commanded by God, because it
 „ is holy & good:., Which supposes that all God's
 „ Commands, if they are all holy and good (between
 „ which, I think, the distinction is only verbal,) are
 „ founded on the Nature, and Reason of things. And
 „ accordingly he says, ¶ „ that God has made (his in-
 „ telligent Creatures) so far like himself, as to endure
 „ them

X 3

* Pag. 113. † Pag. 87, 88. ‡ Pag. 121.

§ Pag. 86, 87. ¶ Pag. 28.

„ them with those excellent faculties of Reason and
 „ Will, whereby they are enabl'd to distinguish Good
 „ from Evil, & to choose the one, & refuse the other.
 Which supposes those are the only things which God
 commands, or forbids, otherwise these excellent fa-
 culties wou'd only enable them to know but part of
 the Will of God, tho' God can will nothing but what
 is for their good, that being the sole end of his
 creating them.

And he supposes, that „ this Law of Nature is
 „ not founded in the positive Will of God, but arises
 „ from the different relations & respects which things
 „ have to one another, which makes some things fit,
 „ and others unfit to be done. And says, that *
 „ the Law of Nature has its *ful* obligatory power,
 „ antecedent to all considerations of any particular
 „ *private*, & *personal reward* or *punishment*, annex'd
 „ either by natural consequence, or by positive ap-
 „ pointment, to the observance, or neglect of it.
 „ This also is very evident: Because if Good & Evil,
 „ Right & Wrong, fitness & unfitness of being prac-
 „ tised, be (as has been shown) originally, eternally,
 „ and necessarily, in the nature of the things them-
 „ selves: 'tis plain, that the view of *particular rewards*
 „ or *punishments*, which is only an after-consideration,
 „ & does not at all alter the nature of things, cannot
 „ be the original cause of the obligation of the Law,
 „ but is only an additional weight to enforce the
 „ practice of what Men were before oblig'd to by
 „ right Reason. „ And to prove this he says, that
 „ † the judgment & conscience of a Man's own mind,
 „ concerning the reasonableness, & fitness of the thing,
 „ that his actions should be conform'd to such, or
 „ such a Rule, or Law, is the truest, or formallest
 „ *obligation*, even more properly, & strictly so, than
 „ any opinion whatsoever of the authority of the
 „ giver of a Law, or any regard he may have to its
 sanc-

* P43. 89. † P43. 53.

sanctions by rewards & punishments. For whoever acts contrary to this sense, & conscience of his own mind, is necessarily self-condemned; & the greatest, & strongest of all obligations is that, which a Man cannot break through without condemning himself. And,

He likewise affirms, that * these eternal moral obligations, as they are really in perpetual force, merely from their own nature, and the abstract Reason of things; so also they are moreover the express & unalterable Will, and Command of God to his Creatures, which he cannot but expect should, in obedience to his supreme Authority, as well as in compliance with the natural Reason of things, be regularly, & constantly observ'd thro' the whole Creation. Which not only supposes; that the Reason of things, & the divine Commands are inseparable; but that 'tis the reason, or the fitness of the thing, that makes it a divine Law; and consequently, that they who never heard of any external Revelation, yet if they know from the nature of things what's fit for them to do, they know all that God will, or can require of them; since his Commands are to be measur'd by the antecedent fitness of Things; & Things can only be said to be fit, or unfit, as they are, for or against the common good. And if the Creator will do every thing, the relation he stands in to his Creatures makes it fit for him to do; and expects nothing from them, but what the relation they stand in to him, and one another, makes likewise fit for them to do, how can they be ignorant of their duty? Especially, if, as the Dr. demonstrates, † „ All the same reasons & arguments, which discover to Men the natural fitnesses, or unfitnesses of things, and the necessary perfections, or attributes of God, prove equally at the same time, that that, which is truly

X 4

„ the Law of Nature, or the Reason of things, is in
 „ like manner the Will of God. „ And,
 „ HE justly observes, that tho' * „ This method of
 „ deducing the Will of God from his Attributes, is
 „ of all others the best and clearest, the certainest &
 „ most universal, that the Light of Nature affords,
 „ yet there are other collateral considerations, which
 „ prove, & confirm the same. „ And that

„ † THE same may be prov'd from the tendency,
 „ & practice of Morality, to the good and happiness
 „ of the whole World: „ Which, indeed, wou'd be
 „ no proof, were any thing commanded that had no
 „ such tendency; for such things, according to the pe-
 „ nalties they were to be enforc'd by, wou'd be more,
 „ or less to the hurt of Mankind.

To shew the natural connexion there is between
 all the parts of Religion, he says, ‡ „ Who believes
 „ the Being, and natural Attributes of God, must of
 „ necessity confess his moral Attributes also. Next,
 „ he who owns, and has just notions of the moral
 „ Attributes of God, cannot avoid acknowledging the
 „ obligations of Morality, & Natural Religion. In like
 „ manner, he who owns the obligations of Morality
 „ and Natural Religion, must needs to support those
 „ obligations, and make them effectual in practice,
 „ believe a future state of rewards and punishments.
 And he affirms, that § „ the certainty of a future
 „ state of rewards & punishments, is in general de-
 „ ducible, even demonstrably, by a chain of clear,
 „ & undeniable reasoning; „ nay, he says, ¶ „ 'tis a
 „ proposition in a manner self-evident. „ And speaking
 of some arguments he had before mention'd, he says,
 „ ✕ these are very good, and strong arguments for
 „ the great probability of a future state; but that
 „ drawn from the consideration of the moral Attri-
 butes

* Pag. 119. † Pag. 121. ‡ Pag. 34.
 § Pag. 8. ¶ Pag. 123. ✕ Pag. 354.

„ bates of God, seems to amount even to a Demon-
 „ stration: Nay, to a compleat Demonstration.*

„ IN short, the Dr's *Hypothesis* is, That upon God's
 „ framing Mankind after the manner he has done,
 „ there are certain things resulting from thence, which
 „ naturally, & necessarily conduce to their good or hurt;
 „ and that the way to know the Will of God, is to
 „ know what those things are, in order to do the one,
 „ and to avoid the other. For which reason God gave
 „ Mankind understanding, which (without blaspheming
 „ the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God) must be
 „ allow'd to be sufficient to answer the end for which
 „ it was given. And that a Being, infinitely wise & good,
 „ as well as wholly disinterested, can require nothing of
 „ Men, but what they, for the sake of their own in-
 „ terest, tho' there were no positive divine Commands,
 „ were oblig'd to do; and consequently, that whoever
 „ acts for his own good, in subserviency to that of the
 „ Publick, answers the end of his creation. As this
 „ scheme of things, to do the Doctor justice, gives us
 „ the highest idea of the goodness, wisdom, & perfec-
 „ tion of the divine Being; so to complicit his moral
 „ character, the Dr. represents the Laws of God, by
 „ which Mankind are to govern all their actions, as most
 „ plain & obvious, & even impress'd on human nature.
 „ And therefore says,

„ † THAT all rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern
 „ themselves, in all their actions, by the eternal Rea-
 „ son of things, is evident from the sense; all, even
 „ wicked Men, ‡ unavoidably have of their being
 „ under such an obligation; § & from the judgment
 „ of Mens Consciences on their own actions. „
 „ And that ¶ „ the most profligate of all Mankind,
 „ however industriously they endeavour to conceal,
 „ & deny their self-condemnation, yet cannot avoid
 „ making a discovery of it sometimes when they are
 „ not

X 5

* Pag. 140, 141. † Pag. 48.

‡ Consents pag. 52. § Ib. pag. 54. ¶ Pag. 57.

„ not aware of it. „ And that every Man, * „ by
 „ the reason of his mind, cannot but be compell'd to
 „ own, & acknowledge, that there is really such an
 „ obligation indispensably incumbent upon him. „
 „ And † „ They who *do* evil, yet *see*, & *approve* what
 „ is good, and condemn in *others* what they blindly
 „ allow in *themselves*; nay, very frequently condemn
 „ even themselves also, not without great disorder,
 „ & uneasiness of mind in those very things wherein
 „ they allow themselves. „ And herein, give me leave
 to say, consists the excellency of the Law of Nature;
 that tho' a Man is so brutish as not to observe it him-
 self, yet he wou'd have all others religiously observe it;
 and no Rule can be calculated for the general good,
 but what is so fram'd; and if Men wou'd make this a
 test of the Will of God, how happy wou'd they be?

THE Dr. more fully to prove his point, says, That
 „ ‡ the mind of Man naturally, & necessarily assents
 „ to the eternal Law of Righteousness, may still bet-
 „ ter, and more clearly, & more universally appear,
 „ from the judgment that Men pass on each *others*
 „ actions, than what we can discern concerning their
 „ consciousness of their own. „ And there he shews,
 That § „ the unprejudic'd Mind of Man as naturally
 „ disapproves injustice in morall matters, as in na-
 „ tural things it cannot but dissent from falsehood,
 „ or dislike incongruities. „ And again,
 „ ¶ THE case is truly thus, that the eternal dif-
 „ ferences of Good & Evil, the unalterable Rule of
 „ Right & Equity, do necessarily, & unavoidably de-
 „ termine the judgment, and force the assent of all
 „ that use any consideration, is undeniably manifest
 „ from the universal experience of Mankind. ✕ For
 „ no Man *willingly*, and *deliberately* transgresses this
 „ Rule in any *great*, & *considerable* instance, but he
 „ acts contrary to the Judgment, & Reason of his own
 mind.

* Pag. 53. † Pag. 60. ‡ Pag. 58.

§ Pag. 61. ¶ Pag. 54. ✕ Pag. 55.

mind; & secretly reproaches himself for so doing: And no Man observes, & obeys it steadily, especially in cases of *difficulty* and *temptation*, when it interferes with any present interest, pleasure, or passion; but his own mind commends, and applauds him for his resolution; in executing what his Conscience cou'd not forbear giving his assent to, as just, & right. And this is what St. Paul means, when he says, (*Rom. 2. 14, 15*): that *When the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law.* And in another place he says, *; No Man does good, brave, and generous actions; but the Reason of his own Mind applauds him for his so doing; and no Man, at any time, does things base, vile, dishonourable, and wicked; but at the same time he condemns himself. And he says, that †, the eternal Rule of Right ought as indispensably to govern Mens actions, as it cannot but necessarily determine their assent.

One would be apt to think, that the Dr. believ'd that Man without reflection, cou'd not but know the Law of Nature, & be in love with it; since he says, ‡ That in reading Histories of far & distant Countries, where 'tis manifest we can have no concern for the event of things; nor prejudices concerning the characters of persons; who is there that does not praise, & admire, nay, highly esteem, and in his imagination love, as it were, the equity, truth, justice, & fidelity of some persons; and with the greatest indignation & hatred, detest the barbarity, & injustice of others? Nay, further, when the prejudices of corrupt minds lye all on the side of injustice, as when we have obtain'd some very great profit, or advantage, thro' another Man's treachery, or breach of faith; yet who is there, that upon that very occasion, does not (even to a proverb) dislike the *Person*, & the *Action*, how much soever he may rejoice at the event.

THESE

THESE reasons shew the infinite goodness of God, by not only thus deeply impressing that Law on human nature, by which God expects all Men shou'd govern all their actions; but in making the very observing this Law, to carry with it, distinct from the good it produces, the highest satisfaction, & rational enjoyment; and the contrary, that sorrow, remorse, & self-condemnation, which are the unavoidable consequence of acting against it: And of this the Philosophers of old, and I believe, all since, who do not adulterate Religion with things that are not moral (and consequently, carry no satisfaction with them) must be sensible. But as it wou'd be endless, to mention all the Dr. says of the irresistable evidence, as well as the absolute perfection of the eternal, & immutable Law of Nature, I shall recite but one passage more, which he supports by the Authority of Bishop Cumberland. „ This, says he, * is that Law of Nature, „ to which the Reason of all Men, every where, as „ naturally, & necessarily assents, as all Animals conspire in the pulse, and motion of their heart & arteries; or as all Men agree in their judgment concerning the whiteness of snow, or the brightness of the Sun.

B. THIS, indeed, is so full & home, that no ancient, or modern Deist cou'd have said more in praise of the unlimited Wisdom, and universal Goodness of God; than in supposing the common Parent of Mankind, has given all his Children, even those of the lowest capacities, and at all times, sufficient means, of discovering whatever makes for their present, and future happiness; and that no Man can plead ignorance of a Law as evident as that the Sun is bright, or snow white; and as inseparable from rational nature, as the pulse of the heart and arteries are from animal nature.

A. If this be talking like a Deist, all who write on this subject talk thus; since they all maintain, that there must be a Law of eternal rectitude flowing from the Nature of things, otherwise there could be no actions good, or lovely in themselves; no real distinction between Virtue & Vice; Good or Evil; and that God can't dispense with his Creatures, or with himself, for not observing it; otherwise an arbitrary will, which might change every moment, would govern every thing; and that this Law of eternal rectitude is implanted in Man at his very creation; & that no Man can act contrary to it, but does violence to himself, and sins against his very make, & constitution. And can it be otherwise, when the only innate Principle in Man is the desire of his own happiness; and the Goodness of God requires no more than a right cultivating of this Principle; in preferring a general, or publick, to a particular, or private good: And where there are two Evils, and both can't be avoided, to choose the less *sub ratione boni*.

THE latter part of the Dr's Discourse is chiefly level'd against those he calls the *True Deists*, and that you may know what sort of Men they are he combats, he gives you their Creed.

THESE Deists, *says he*, * did they believe what they pretend, have just, and right notions of God, and of all the divine Attributes in every respect, who declare they believe there is one eternal, infinite, intelligent, all powerful, and wise Being; the Creator, Preserver, & Governor of all things; That this supreme Cause is a Being of infinite Justice, Goodness and Truth, and all other moral as well as natural perfections; That he made the World for the manifestation of his Power and Wisdom, and to communicate his Goodness & Happiness to his Creatures; That he preserves it by his continual

„ all-wise Providence, & governs it according to the
 „ eternal Rules of infinite Justice, Equity, Goodness,
 „ Mercy, & Truth; *That* all created, rational Beings,
 „ depending continually upon him, are bound to
 „ adore, worship, & obey him; To praise him for
 „ all things they enjoy, & to pray to him for every
 „ thing they want; *That* they are all obliged to pro-
 „ mote in their proportion, and according to the
 „ extent of their several powers & abilities, the gene-
 „ ral Good and welfare of those parts of the World
 „ wherein they are plac'd. In like manner, as the
 „ divine Goodness is continually promoting the uni-
 „ versal benefit of the Whole; *That* Men, in parti-
 „ cular, are every where oblig'd to make it their
 „ business, by an universal benevolence to promote
 „ the happiness of all others: *That* in order to this,
 „ every Man is bound always to behave himself so
 „ towards others, as in reason he would desire they
 „ should in the like circumstances deal with him;
 „ Wherefore, he is oblig'd to obey, and submit to
 „ his Superiors in all just, and right things, for the
 „ preservation of society, and the peace & benefit of
 „ the Publick; To be just & honest, equitable and
 „ sincere in all his dealings with his equals, for the
 „ keeping inviolable the everlasting Rule of Right-
 „ teousness, and maintaining an universal trust and
 „ confidence, friendship and affection amongst Men;
 „ and towards his inferiors to be gentle and kind,
 „ easy and affable, charitable and willing to assist as
 „ many as stand in need of his help, for the preser-
 „ vation of universal love and benevolence amongst
 „ Mankind, & in imitation of the Goodness of God,
 „ who preserves, and does good to all his Creatures,
 „ which depend entirely upon him for their very
 „ Being, and all that they enjoy. *That* in respect of
 „ himself, every Man is bound to preserve, as much
 „ as in him lies, his own Being, and the right use
 „ of all his faculties, so long as it shall please God,

who

who appointed him his station in this world, to continue him therein: *That* therefore, he is bound to have an exact government of his passions, and carefully to abstain from all debaucheries & abuses of himself, which tend either to the destruction of his own Being, or to the disorders of his faculties, and disabling him from performing his duty, or hurrying him into the practice of unreasonable, & unjust things. Lastly, *That* according as Men regard, or neglect these obligations, so they are proportionably acceptable, or displeasing unto God; who being supreme Governor of the World, cannot but testify his favour, or displeasure, at some time, or other; and consequently, since this is not done in the present state, therefore there must be a future state of rewards and punishments in a life to come.

THE Deists, no doubt, will own, that the Dr. has done them justice; since all their Principles, as he represents them, have a direct tendency to make them good Men; and contain nothing to divert them from intirely attending to all the duties of Morality, in which the whole of their Religion consists; & which leaves them no room for those endless quarrels and fatal divisions, which zeal for other things, has occasion'd among their fellow-creatures; and whom they pity upon the account of that insupportable bondage, which superstition has, in most places, laid them under. And must not a Religion, which the Dr. has prov'd to be demonstrably founded on the eternal Reason of things, have a more powerful influence on rational Beings, than if it was laid on any other bottom. How can a Religion, which, as the Dr. describes it, carries in all its parts, such evident marks of Wisdom and Goodness, fail to make Men in love with their duty; when they must plainly see, that, and their interest to be inseparable? If Princes requir'd no more of their Subjects, & private Men of their Neighbours, than

than to be govern'd by these Principles; how happy would the World be, thus govern'd?

I do not perceive the Dr. himself finds any defect in their Principles; but only objects to their manner of taking them as they are discoverable by the Light of Nature, and the Reason of Things. *

B. Is not that a very just objection?

A. Not from one who supposes, that, the eternal Reason of Things ought to be the Rule by which all Men should govern all their actions;,, & who, among other things of the like nature, affirms, that, † the original Obligation of all is the eternal Reason of Things; That Reason, which God himself, who has no Superior to direct him, or to whose happiness nothing can be added, or any thing diminish'd, from it, yet constantly obliges himself to govern the World by: And the more excellent, & perfect his Creatures are, the more chearfully, & steddily are their wills determin'd by this *supreme obligation*, in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the most perfect Will of God.

B. WHY do you think this favours *Deism*?

A. BECAUSE, if the eternal Reason of things is the *supreme Obligation*, must not that, if there's any difference between it and external Revelation, take place? And must not that Rule, which can annul any other, be not only the supreme, but the sole Rule; for as far as Men take any other Rule, so far they lose of their perfection, by ceasing to be govern'd by this Rule, in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the perfect Will of God. And if this most perfect Will of God is to be thus known, can things that have another original, and are of a later date, be any part of the most perfect Will of God? Or, can the eternal Reason of Things extend to things that do not belong to Reason; or, as Divines love to speak, are above Reason? Or, can the Dr. suppose, there's

* Pag. 29.

† Pag. 54.

there's any other Rule, than the Nature, or Reason of Things, when he makes no medium between Mens being govern'd by it, and by their own unreasonable will? *

In short, 'tis the view with which an action is done, that makes it moral: He, who pays his debts out of a principle of honesty, does a moral action; while he, who does the same for fear of the Law, can't be said to act morally: And can he, who does a thing to avoid being punish'd, or in hopes of being rewarded hereafter (& for the same reason is ready to do the contrary) merit, at least, equally with him, who is in love with his duty, and is govern'd, not by servile motives, but by the original obligation of the moral fitness of things, in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the perfect will of God? This the Dr. will not deny to be true Deism; and that they who do not act thus, deserve not the title of *True Deists*.

THE Doctor, after he has himself, giv'n us a consistent scheme of *Deism*, says, † „There is *now* no „ such thing, as a consistent scheme of *Deism*: That „ which alone was *once* such — ceases *now* to be so, „ after the appearance of Revelation.„ If Christianity, as well as *Deism*, consists in being govern'd by the original obligation of the moral fitness of things, in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the perfect will of God, then they both must be the same: but if Christianity consists in being govern'd by any other Rule, or requires any other things, has not the Dr. himself giv'n the advantage to *Deism*?

THESE *true Christian Deists*, as, I think, the Dr. ought to call them, say, that tho' the Dr's Discourse is chiefly levell'd against them, yet he can't differ with them, without differing from himself; & condemning

* *Demonstration of the Being and Attrib. of God*, p. 131.

† *Id.* p. 33.

demning in one part of his elaborate Treatise, what he has approv'd in the other. For,

If Christianity has not, *say they*, destroy'd Mens moral agency, or forbid them to act as moral Agents, they must now, as well as formerly, judge of the Will of God, by that Reason given them by an all-gracious God, to distinguish between Good & Evil; the only things to which the Precepts of a Being, who, as the Dr. owns, is incapable of acting arbitrarily, can extend: And these *Deists* agree with the Dr. in his two first propositions, upon which, the whole of his reasoning is built: * „ That from the eternal, & necessary Differences of things, there naturally arise certain „ moral obligations, which are of themselves incumbent on all rational Creatures, antecedent to all „ positive institution, & to all expectation of reward „ and punishment. „ And,

„ THAT the same eternal moral obligations, which „ arise necessarily from the natural Differences of „ things, are moreover the express Will & Command „ of God to all rational Creatures: „ And accordingly they judge of the positive Will of God, from those eternal moral obligations, which arise necessarily from the natural Differences of things; which being incumbent on all rational Creatures, antecedent to all positive institution, can't but be so knowable by them: & having, agreeable to the Dr's direction, thus chosen their Religion, *they say*, 'Tis impossible for them (since there can't be two originals of the same thing) to choose that Religion from external Revelation, which they have already chosen from internal Revelation; and if external Revelation can't alter the nature of things, & make that to be fit, which is in itself unfit, and that to be necessary which is in itself unnecessary, it can only be a transcript of the Religion of Nature, and so every thing it says, is to be judg'd of by the Reason, and Nature of things: other-

* See the Contents of the Dr's Book.

otherwise, say they, we might be oblig'd to admit things, which, for ought we know, are as necessarily false, as God is true; since * „ all Doctrines inconsistent with Morality, are, *as the Dr. justly observes*, „ as certainly, & necessarily false, as God is true.

BESIDES, if these moral Obligations, which of themselves are incumbent on all rational Creatures, & which likewise shew themselves from their internal excellency, to be the will of God, are as evident, as the Sun is bright; how can Men, say these *Deists*, believe on lesser evidence, what they know before to be certain on the greatest; in this case, must not Faith be swallow'd up by Knowledge, & Probability by Demonstration?

THESE *Deists* intirely agree with the Dr, when he asserts, that † „ Some Doctrines are in their own nature necessarily, & demonstrably true, such as are „ all those which concern the obligation of plain „ moral Precepts; and these neither need, nor can receive any stronger proof from miracles, than what they have already (tho' not, perhaps, so clearly „ indeed to all capacities) from the evidence of right Reason. Other Doctrines are in their own nature necessarily false, & impossible to be true; such „ as are all absurdities & contradictions, & all Doctrines „ that tend to promote vice; and these can never receive any degree of proof from all the miracles „ in the world., „ But as to what the Dr. adds, ‡ „ That other Doctrines are in their own nature indifferent, or possible, or, perhaps, probable to be true, „ and those cou'd not have been known to be positively true, but by the evidence of miracles, which „ prove them to be certain., „ Here these *Deists* beg leave to differ with him, as to any doctrines, in their own nature indifferent, being the Will of God; for that would be to suppose, what the Dr. has prov'd to be impossible, that God acts arbitrarily, & out of meer willfulness. And here they wou'd ask him,

Y 2

since,

since, as he owns, * „ Evil Spirits can do Miracles,
 „ † and the nature of the doctrine to be prov'd to be
 „ divine, must be taken into consideration; how Mi-
 „ racles can prove a doctrine, relating to indifferent
 „ things, to be from God? Or, how there can be any
 „ such doctrines in the Christian Religion, if what he
 „ says be true; ‡ „ That every one of the Doctrines it
 „ teaches, as matter of truth, has a natural tendency,
 „ & a direct powerful influence to reform Mens lives,
 „ and correct their manners. This, *adds he*, is the
 „ great end, & ultimate design of all true Religion:
 „ And 'tis a great and fatal mistake to think that any
 „ Doctrine, or any belief whatever, can be any other-
 „ wise of any benefit to Men, than as it is fitted to
 „ promote this main end.

THIS supposes Men, by their Reason, are not only
 able to know, that it is repugnant to the nature of
 God, to require any thing of them, except it has a
 natural tendency, and a direct powerful influence to
 reform their lives, or correct their manners, but like-
 wise to discern what Doctrines have this tendency;
 and that, if, upon examination, they find every Doc-
 trine contain'd in Scripture has this tendency, they
 may, then, safely pronounce them all to be divine.
 This previous examination, therefore, is highly ne-
 cessary to prevent what he justly calls a *fatal mistake*.

THE difference between those, who would engross
 the Name of Christians to themselves, & these *Chri-
 stian Deists*, as I may justly call them, is, that the
 former dare not examine into the truth of Scripture
 Doctrines, lest they should seem to question the vera-
 city of the Scriptures; whereas the latter, who believe
 not the Doctrines, because contain'd in Scripture,
 but the Scripture, on account of the Doctrines, are
 under no such apprehension: For having critically
 examin'd those Doctrines by that Reason, which God
 has giv'n them to distinguish Religion from Supersti-
 tion,

* *Pag.* 306. † *Pag.* 312. ‡ *Pag.* 184.

tion, they are sure not to run into any errors of moment; notwithstanding the confess'd obscurity of the Scriptures, and those many mistakes that have crept into the Text, whether by accident, or design.

THE Dr. says, * „ The moral part of our Saviour's „ Doctrine wou'd have appear'd infallibly true, whether „ he had ever work'd miracles, or no. The rest of „ his Doctrines was what evidently tended to promote the honour of God, & the practice of righteousness amongst Men. Therefore that part also of „ his Doctrine was possible, and very probable to be „ true; but yet it could not from thence be known „ to be certainly true; nor ought to have been received as a Revelation from God, unless it had been „ prov'd by undeniable miracles.

HERE the *Dr.* can, by no means, come into the Dr's distinction between the moral part of our Saviour's Doctrine, & that part which evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the practice of Righteousness; it being manifestly a distinction without any difference: And if the whole of Religion consists in the Honour of God, and the Good of Man, which he is far from denying; nothing can more effectually strike at the certainty of all Religion, than the supposing, that Mankind cou'd not be certain, that whatever evidently tended to promote the honour of God, & the practice of righteousness, was the Will of God, till they were convinc'd of it by undeniable Miracles.

'Tis possible, say they, a Man may doubt, whether there is a God; but none sure, who believe one, can doubt, but that 'tis demonstrably fit, just, & reasonable for Men, to do every thing, that evidently tends to promote the honour of God, & the practice of righteousness. And, „ if the mind of Man, as the Dr. says, † „ can't avoid giving its assent to the eternal Law of Righteousness; „ can the mind of Man

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avoid

avoid assenting to the practice of Righteousness as his indispensable duty? But if it be but probable, that whatever evidently tends to promote the honour of God, and the practice of righteousness, is from God; it can't be more than probable, that miracles done in their behalf are from God. Does not the Dr. here destroy the certainty of these Doctrines, which he had before demonstrated, & this too only to prove their probability?

THESE *Christian Deists* own the Dr. is in the right, for contending, that the necessary relation that is between things, makes some actions moral, & others immoral; but then they wou'd ask, Whether there be any other way to distinguish them, but from their nature & tendency? for they can't but conclude, that those which evidently tend to promote the honour of God, & the practice of righteousness, are plain moral Duties, and perpetually oblige. And,

„ IF no Miracles, as the Dr. owns, * can prove „ a Doctrine that's vicious in its tendency & consequences, to be from God; „ must not, say they, that Doctrine, which has the contrary tendency and consequences, be from God, tho' ever so many miracles are done in opposition to it? And,

THEY likewise say, As evidently as God is not only a good & perfect, but also the only perfect Being, so evident is it, that every Doctrine, that carries any degree, much more the highest degree of goodness and perfection in it, has the character of Divinity impress'd on it; & therefore, can't agree with the Dr, „ † That neither can any degree of goodness, and „ excellency in the Doctrine itself, make it certain, „ but only highly probable to come from God.

IF no Miracles can prove any indifferent thing to be the Will of God, and all that evidently tends to promote the honour of God, and the practice of righteousness, are plain, moral Duties, as the Dr. contends,

* Pag. 315. † Pag. 221.

tends, and all such Duties neither need, nor can receive any stronger proof from Miracles, than what they have already from the evidence of right Reason, how can Miracles, *say these Deists*, have any other use, than to make Men consider the nature, & tendency of a Doctrine, and judge from thence whether it be from God? But,

ALLOWING the Dr. what *Hypothesis* he pleases, in relation to Miracles, yet if the Doctrines themselves, from their internal excellency, do not give us a certain proof of the Will of God, no traditional Miracles can do it, because one probability added to another will not amount to certainty.

B. I thought the Dr. had built his arguments in favour of Revelation, upon the obscurity of the Law of Nature, & would not have declar'd, that * „the „ Reason of all Men, every where, as naturally, and „ necessarily assents to it, as all Animals conspire in „ the pulse, and motion of their heart and arteries, „ or as all Men agree in their judgment concerning „ the whiteness of snow, or the brightness of the Sun.

A. HAVE patience, and you shall see, that *Snow is no longer white, or the Sun bright*; and in order to it I'll shew you, that the Dr's new scheme consists in supposing, that tho' † „ in the original uncorrupted „ state of human-Nature, right Reason may justly be „ supposed to have been a sufficient guide, and a „ principle powerful enough to have preserv'd Men „ in the constant practice of their duty, yet upon „ the Fall, Mankind were in a very bad state, as „ wanting greater help, and assistance, than the Light „ of Nature could afford them. ‡ And *that* there „ was plainly wanting some extraordinary, & super- „ natural assistance, that was above the reach of bare „ Reason and Philosophy to procure. § There was „ plainly wanting a divine Revelation to recover „ Mankind out of their universally degenerate state,

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into

* Pag. 83. † Pag. 196. ‡ Pag. 197. § *Ibid.*

„ into a state suitable to the original dignity of their Nature. „ And again, * „ There was plainly „ wanting a divine Revelation, to recover Mankind „ out of their universal corruption and degeneracy. „ *And in the Margin,* „ A divine Revelation absolutely „ necessary for the recovery of Mankind: „ But if a divine Revelation was absolutely necessary to this end, Men were under an absolute impossibility of recovering without it.

THIS is supposing, God had left all Mankind for 4000 years together, & even the greatest part to this day, destitute of sufficient means to do their duty, and to preserve themselves from sinking into a corrupted & degenerate state; and that it was impossible for them when thus sunk, to recover themselves: and yet that God (their duty being the same after, as before the Fall,) expected impossibilities from them; viz. either to preserve themselves from thus falling; or if fallen, to recover themselves. But if they had not power to do this, and it was not their fault, that they at first were in, and after remain'd in what he calls a state of universal degeneracy and corruption, this must then be the state God design'd they shou'd be in; and it wou'd seem not only to be in vain, but a crime in them, to endeavour to change that state, in which, God, of his infinite Wisdom & Goodness, thought fit to place them. But,

IF Men alike, at all times, owe their existence to God, they at all times must be created in a state of innocence, capable of knowing, and doing all God requires of them; and we must conclude from the Wisdom & Goodness of God, that he will at no time command any thing, nor fit for him to command, or for Man to do: and therefore, cou'd we suppose some things commanded by external Revelation, which were not commanded by the Light of Nature, we must conclude, that 'till then it was not fit for God

God to command them, or for Man uncommanded to do them.

THE Dr. to shew the fault was not in Mankind, but in the Guide God gave them, says, * „ The Light „ of Nature, and right Reason, was altogether insufficient to restore true Piety: „ and as tho' this was not enough, he adds, „ that the Light of Nature „ no where appear'd: „ which Sentences seem inconsistent, since the first supposes a Light, tho' insufficient, appearing to Mens minds, but the Dr. does not seem to know whether they had no light at all, or † „ a Light, which, *he says*, has undeniable defects in it.

B. MAY not the Law of Nature be very clear, tho' the Light of Nature may be so very dim, as to have undeniable defects?

A. CAN the Law of Nature be clear, & the Light of Nature dim, when the Law of Nature is nothing, but what the Light of Nature, or Reason dictates? Or, as Dr. *Soc* expresses it, † „ Right Reason pronouncing such actions good, and such evil, is the „ Law of Nature, and those eternal reasons, upon „ which it so pronounces them, are the Creed of „ Nature, both which together make *Natural Religion*.

THE Dr. to pursue this point, & to shew that the fault was not in the Creatures, but the Creator; says, that § „ Even those few extraordinary Men of the „ Philosophers, who did sincerely endeavour to reform Mankind, were themselves intircly ignorant „ of some Doctrines, absolutely necessary for bringing „ about this great end of the reformation, & recovery „ of Mankind; -- Their whole attempt to discover „ the truth of things, and to instruct others therein, „ was like wandering in the wide sea, without knowing

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whither

* Pag. 228. † Pag. 214. ‡ *Christ. Life. P. 2. Vol. I. Ch. 2. p. 75.* § Pag. 176.

„ whither to go, or which way to take, or having
 „ any guide to conduct them?

AND that you might be sure, that the fault was in the eternal, universal, & unchangeable Law of Nature; he calls those Philosophers, who thus wander'd in the wide sea, * „ wise, brave, & good Men. who made „ it their business to study, & practise the duties of „ Natural Religion themselves, & to teach, & exhort „ others to do the like; „ nay, one would imagine he thought them, notwithstanding their unavoidable ignorance, inspir'd; since he says, † „ There never „ was a great Man, but who was inspir'd; *Nemo unquam magnus Vir sine divino afflatu fuit*: And for this he quotes the authority of Cicero, who, if the Dr's reasoning is just, was certainly inspir'd.

THE Dr's Scheme outdoes that of the most rigid *Predestinarians*, for that at all times saves the Elect: But here are no Elect, but all, for many ages, are inextricably involv'd in a most deprav'd, corrupted, and impious state.

THE Dr. justly says, ‡ „ Let none on pretence „ of maintaining Natural Religion, revile, and blaspheme the Christian, lest they be found liars unto „ God: „ And for the same reason, may not I say, let none blaspheme Natural Religion? Tho, if Natural & Reveal'd Religion can differ, it must be a greater crime to revile a Religion, that is eternal, universal, and unchangeable, than a Religion that is not so. And,

THO' I pay a due deference to the Dr's deep penetration in matters of Religion, I dare not say, there's the least difference between the *Law of Nature*, & the *Gospel*; for that would suppose some defect in one of them, & reflect on the Author of both; who, certainly, was equally good, and equally wise, when he gave the one, as when he gave the other (if

(if it may be call'd another) Law. * Nor dare I be so rash, as to charge the Light of Nature with *undeniable defects*, as the Dr. presumes to do; since, if that Light was sufficient to answer the end design'd by God, which was to be a competent guide to Men, in relation to their present, and future happiness, there could be no deficiency: If not, then there must have been an undeniable default in the giver of it, in appointing means not sufficient to answer their design'd ends; tho' both means and ends were intirely in his power. Nor dare I say, „ There are several „ necessary truths, not possible to be discover'd with „ any certainty by the Light of Nature; „ because God's means of information will, & must always bear an exact proportion to the necessity of our knowing what we are oblig'd to know, especially touching the *Nature*, and *Attributes of God*, which, he supposes, „ † were very difficult for the wisest Men to find out, „ & more difficult for them to explain. „ But here I must do the Dr. that justice, as to observe, that he, in another place, is so far from finding any such defect in this Light, even with relation to the nature & attributes of God, that he says, † „ All the heathen „ World had certain means of knowing God, for „ § *That which may be known of God, was manifest* „ enough unto Men in all Ages. „ And if no Age can know more of God, than *that which may be known*, & if that which *may be known* of him was manifest enough in all Ages, what advantage can one Age in this grand point have above another? And, therefore, I must conclude,

It can't be imputed to any defect in the Light of Nature, that the Pagan World ran into Idolatry, but to their being intirely govern'd by Priests, who pretended communication with their Gods, and to have thence their Revelations, which they impos'd on the credulous as divine Oracles: Whereas the business of

* Pag. 214. † Pag. 178. ‡ Pag. 161. § Pag. 160.

the Christian dispensation was to destroy all those traditional Revelations, & restore, free from all Idolatry, the true primitive, and natural Religion, implanted in Mankind from the Creation.

THE Dr. however, seems afraid, lest he had allow'd too much to the Light of Nature, in relation to the discovery of our duty both to God & Man, and not left room for Revelation to make any addition; he therefore supposes, * „there are some Duties, which „ Nature hints at only in general; „ But, if we can't, without highly reflecting on the Wisdom & Goodness of God, suppose, that he has not, at all times, giv'n the whole rational Creation a plain Rule for their conduct, in relation to those Duties they owe to God, themselves, and one another. must we not suppose Reason, and Religion (that *Rule* of all other *Rules*) inseparable, so that no rational Creature can be ignorant of it, who attends to the dictates of his own mind, I mean, as far as 'tis necessary for him to know it. An ignorant Peasant may know what is sufficient for him, without knowing as much as the learned Rector of St. James's.

THO' the Dr. says, „the knowledge of the Law „ of Nature is in fact, by no means, universal; „ yet he asserts, that † „ Man is plainly in his own nature an accountable Creature; „ which supposes that the Light of Nature plainly, and undeniably teaches him that Law, for breach of which he is naturally accountable: And did not the Dr. believe this Law to be universal, he cou'd not infer a future Judgment from the conscience all Men have of their actions, or the judgment they pass on them in their own minds; whereby ‡ „ They that have not any Law; „ are a Law unto themselves; their Consciences bearing „ witness, and their thoughts accusing, or excusing one „ another: „ Which is supposing but one Law, whether that Law be written on paper, or in Mens hearts

* Pag. 239. † Pag. 152. ‡ *Ibid.*

hearts only; and that all Men, by the judgment they pass on their own actions, are conscious of this Law. And,

THE Apostle *Paul*, tho' quoted by the Dr, is so far from favouring his *Hypothesis* of any invincible ignorance, even in the wisest, & best of the Philosophers, that he, by saying, * *The Gentiles that have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law*, makes the Law of Nature and Grace to be the same: And supposes the reason why they were to be punish'd, was their sinning against Light and knowledge: † *That which may be known of God was manifest in them, & when they knew God, they glorify'd him not as God*: And they were likewise guilty of abominable corruptions, not ignorantly, but ‡ *knowing the Judgment of God, that they who do such things are worthy of death*. Had the Dr. but consider'd this self-evident Proposition, that *There can be no Transgression where there is no Law*; and that an unknown Law is the same as no Law, and consequently, that all Mankind, at all times, must be capable of knowing all (whether more, or less,) that God requires: It would have prevented his endeavouring to prove, that, till the Gospel dispensation, Mankind were entirely, and unavoidably ignorant of their duty in several important points, and thus charging the Light of Nature with undeniable defects.

I think it no compliment to external Revelation, tho' the Dr. design'd it as the highest, to say, it prevail'd, when the Light of Nature was, as he supposes, in a manner extinct; since then an irrational Religion might as easily obtain, as a rational one.

THE Dr, to prove that Revelation has supply'd the insufficiency, and undeniable defects of the Light of Nature, refers us to *Phil. 4. 8*: which he introduces after this pompous manner; § „ Let any Man of an honest,

* *Rom. 2. 14.* † *Rom. 1. 19. 21.* ‡ *1b. ver. 32.*
§ *Page. 219.*

„ honest, and sincere mind consider, whether that
 „ practical Doctrine, has not, even *in itself*, the greatest
 „ marks of a divine original, wherein * *Whatsoever*
 „ *things are true, whatsoever things are honest, what-*
 „ *soever things are just, whatsoever things are pure,*
 „ *whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are*
 „ *of good report, if there be any Virtue, if there be*
 „ *any thing praise-worthy: all these, and these only,*
 „ are the things that are earnestly recommended to
 „ Mens practice.

I wou'd ask the Dr. how he can know what these things are, which are thus alone earnestly recommended to Mens practice; or, why they have, in themselves, the greatest marks of a divine original, but from the Light of Nature? Nay, how can the Dr. know, there are defects in the Light of Nature, but from that Light itself? which supposes this Light is all we have to trust to; and consequently, all the Dr. has been doing, on pretence of promoting the honour of Revelation, is introducing universal Scepticism: And I am concern'd, and griev'd, to see a Man, who had so great a share of the Light of Nature, imploy it to expose that Light, of which before he had giv'n the highest commendation; and which can have no other effect, than to weaken even his own Demonstration, drawn from that Light, for the Being of a God.

I shall mention but one text more, which had not the Dr. thought it highly to his purpose, for shewing the insufficiency of the Light of Nature, he wou'd not have us'd it in after this most solemn manner:
 „ † When men have put themselves into this temper
 „ and frame of mind, let them try if they can any
 „ longer reject the evidence of the Gospel: ‡ *If any*
 „ *Man will do his will, he shall know of the Doctrine,*
 „ *whether it be of God.*

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* Phil. 4. 8. † Psal. 34. ‡ John 7. 17.

„ in their behaviour towards God: And this, like-
 „ wise, is founded in the Nature & Reason of Things;
 „ and is what the circumstances and condition they
 „ are in do absolutely require. Thus we see wherein
 „ Moral Virtue, or Good consists, & what the obli-
 „ gation to it is from its own native beauty and ex-
 „ cellency.

B. IF God, as the Dr. asserts, does abhor all arbitrary Commands, and Natural Religion comprehends every thing that is not arbitrary; and withal, is so deeply impress'd on Mens minds, that they can't violate its precepts without self-condemnation; I can't apprehend how these Philosophers, who made it their business to study, & practise Natural Religion, could be intirely ignorant of any Doctrines absolutely necessary for the Reformation of Mankind: Nay, that „ their
 „ whole attempt to discover the truth of things,
 „ was like wandering in the wide sea, without any
 „ guide; and therefore, I shoud be glad to know,
 „ what are these absolutely necessary Doctrines, they
 „ were thus intirely ignorant of.

A. „ These Philosophers, *the Dr. says*, * had no
 „ knowledge of the whole scheme, order, and state
 „ of things. „ This, I think, may be allow'd; since
 I believe there's none at present, who have, or pretend to have so extensive a knowledge. „ But they
 „ had no knowledge of the method of God's governing the World. „ Then they must be blind, if living in the World, they did not see how the things of this World were govern'd by Providence. „ Then
 „ they did not know the ground & circumstances of
 „ Mens present corrupt condition. „ If so, they did not understand human-nature, and how prejudices & passions work on Mankind. „ They did not know, *says he*, „ the manner of the divine interposition necessary for their recovery, and the glorious end, to
 „ which God intended finally to conduct them. „

It must be own'd, they were not in the least acquainted with the Dr's glorious scheme, of all Mankind's being for four thousand years together, & the greatest part too, at present, by the very frame of their constitution, and the condition of their being, plac'd by God in a most deprav'd, degenerate state; without possibility of recovering from it. „ But they had, it seems, „ no knowledge of God's design in creating Mankind. Sure, the Dr. had forgot what he quotes from *Cicero* to this purpose; * „ *Ad tuendos conservandosque homines hominem natum esse. Homines hominum causa „ sunt generati, ut ipsi inter se alii aliis prodesse possint. „ Hominem, nature obnoxium, homini nocere non posse.* And does not the Dr. maintain the same thing, in saying, that † „ God cou'd have no motive to create „ things at first, but only that he might communicate „ to them his goodness & happiness.

„ THESE Philosophers, he says, † were ignorant „ of the original dignity of human-nature. „ And because he frequently insists on it, I shall further consider this matter; and will confess, 'tis probable, they thought that human-nature, Men having at all times the same common faculties, was always the same. Had they known the sacred story of *Adam* and *Eve*, that wou'd have confirm'd them in their sentiments. The most they cou'd perceive by it wou'd be, that the first pair came into the world in every sense naked, destitute of all that knowledge, experience gave their posterity; and therefore, God, the better to support them in this state of universal ignorance, planted a Garden for them, that they might live on the fruit of it. How weak was their Reason, how strong their appetites! when they cou'd not abstain (the sole command giv'n them) from the Fruit of but one Tree; in a garden too; where must needs be an infinite variety, & the choicest Fruit!

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THESE Philosophers might have been at a loss, to conceive, how *Eve* could entertain a conference with a Serpent (incapable of human voice) even before consent had giv'n any meaning to sounds. And they would be apt to ask, Why, (tho' custom hath made it shameful to go without cloaths in those places where cloaths are worn) the first Pair shou'd nevertheless, tho' they knew not what cloaths were, be ashamed to be seen uncloth'd by one another, & by God himself? So that, when * *They heard the voice of God walking in the Garden, in the cool of the evening,* (a strange representation these Philosophers would think of God!) *they hid themselves from his presence:* Nay, God himself (their Fig-leave Aprons, which they, having, it seems, all things necessary for sewing, sew'd together, not being sufficient to hide their shame) made them coats of the skins of the Beasts, newly created in pairs. And they would, likewise, desire to be inform'd, how *Eve*, before her eyes were open'd, saw that the Tree was good for food; & that it was desirable to the eyes, & a Tree to be desir'd to make one wife. †

UPON the whole, I grant, that these Philosophers would be so far from finding out this original dignity in the first Pair, that they would be apt to think, by the Serpent's so easily imposing on her, that the original serpentine nature, was too subtil for the original human-nature; & that there being nothing done by any Serpent since the fall, which cou'd occasion the Precept of Mens being bid to be as wise as Serpents, it must allude to this transaction between the Woman & the Serpent; tho' they could never come into the belief of the *Ophites* ‡ (with whom the *Marcionites* may be join'd) who thought, that *Wisdom* herself was the Serpent, which they prefer'd to Christ, as teaching them to know Good & Evil; and designing for them Immortality and Deity; and foretelling that *Adam*, tho'

* Gen. 3. 8. † 12. 3. 6.

‡ Iren. l. 1. c. 34. Tertull. Prescript. c. 47.

tho' threaten'd with certain *Death on the day he eat the forbidden Fruit*, shou'd not then dye; who accordingly liv'd after that sentence about 900 years: And that *Moses's* erecting the brazen, healing Serpent, was in honour of this Serpent, who design'd so much good to Mankind.

B. THESE Philosophers wou'd be grossly mistaken, did they believe this done by a Serpent: We say, it was the Devil, in the shape of a Serpent, that tempted them.

A. THESE Philosophers, indeed, wou'd see, that the Christians are now alarm'd of the literal interpretation of this story; tho' St. Paul was of another mind, who expressly says, *The Serpent deceiv'd Eve thro' subtilty*. And they, perhaps, wou'd ask, Whether it was the Devil, who is said to be *more subtil than any Beast of the field*; since it was this subtil Beast that said to the Woman, * *Thou shalt not surely die*. And it was upon the Woman's saying, *The Serpent beguiled me, and I did eat*, that the Lord said to the Serpent, † *Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all the Cattle, and above every Beast of the field: ‡ Upon thy belly thou shalt go, & dust thou shalt eat all the days of thy life*. Does this character agree to an immaterial, immortal Being? Did he all the days of his life go upon his belly, & eat dust? Does not God, continuing his discourse to the Serpent, say, *I will put enmity between thee, and the Woman; between thy seed, & her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*? And is not this the consequence of Serpents going on their belly? Do they not frequently bite Men by the heel; especially in hot countries, where Serpents are numerous, & Mens heels bare? Why shall *thy seed*; not signify *thy seed*, but the seed of a Being not mention'd in all this story; & who has no seed, but metaphorical seed; which, since the Woman's seed is taken literally, wou'd be immediately changing the

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* Gen. 3. 4, 5. † Ib. ver. 12. ‡ Ib. ver. 14.

the meaning of the word *jeid*? Does this text afford the least argument, to imagine God did not as much speak to the Serpent, as to *Adam & Eve*? If a book is to be interpreted thus, especially in relation to historical facts; how can we, these Philosophers would say, be sure of its meaning in any one place? Besides, would they not ask, Why the whole race of Serpents should be curs'd for the crime of a fallen Angel?

B. They might as well ask, Why all other Animals should bring forth in pain, for the fault of *Eve*? For had Nature form'd all Females at first, as they have been ever since *Eve* eat the forbidden Fruit, none of them, except by Miracles, could be deliver'd without pain; no more than Serpents, had they at first, been form'd as at present, creep otherwise than they do.

A. THOSE Philosophers, perhaps, would not think the matter a jot mended, by substituting (did the story afford room for it) a Devil, instead of a Serpent; since they could not see, how an infinitely good God could permit a most malicious cunning Spirit to work on the weakness of a Woman, just plac'd in a new World; without interposing in this unequal conflict, or giving notice of any such wicked Spirit; Angels, neither good, nor bad, being mention'd in the History of the Creation. And yet that after the fact was committed, God should thus revenge it on all their innocent posterity for ever, by *cursing the ground*, &c.

WHAT would seem to them most unaccountable is, That God should continue to suffer this subtil, & malignant Spirit, endow'd with an universal knowledge of what is past, & a deep penetration into futurity, to range about deceiving, and circumventing Mankind; who, having a capacity vastly superior to them, is continually sowing the seeds of mischief, & scattering the poison of universal discord, making use of those very Men as his instruments, whose profess'd business it is, to promote universal concord.

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THE poor *Indians*, you know, when our Missionaries give such an account of the Devil, say, „ Is not your God a good God, & loves Mankind? Why does he then permit this Devil to be continually doing them such infinite hurt? Why is he not put under confinement, if not depriv'd of a being, of which he has made himself unworthy? With us one, who does not hinder a mischief, when it is in his power, is thought not much better than he who does it.

BUT to return to the Dr, where is the difference in relation to the goodness of God, & the happiness of Mankind, between God's creating them in a state, as he calls it, of universal degeneracy & corruption; or causing them by the folly of *Adam*, which infinite Wisdom could not but foresee, to fall unavoidably into this bad state? What dignity, what perfection could *Adam's* nature have, that the nature of his Posterity has not? Are they not as much fram'd after the image of their Maker? Are not their souls as much immediately from God as *Adam's*? And are not their Bodies exactly made after the same manner? Were not all other Animals at first created by God as well as Men? Had these any dignity, or perfection in their animal-nature, which the same creatures since have not? Besides, is not this suppos'd high state of perfection in *Adam*, giving the lye to the History? since this very perfect Man, notwithstanding all the original dignity of his nature, had no better excuse for his yielding to the first temptation, than that * *the Woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, gave me of the tree, & I did eat.* How can we suppose his understanding was in the least impair'd by this crime, since God himself says (tho' to whom it does not appear) † *Behold the Man is become like one of us, to know good and evil; and to prevent his being so, both for immortality as well as knowledge, ‡ God placed Cherubims with a flaming sword, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree.*

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* Gen. 3. 12. † Is. 55. 22. ‡ Is. 64. 24.

Tree of life. Would it not be very strange, that his Posterity (while his understanding receiv'd no hurt,) shou'd suffer so greatly in theirs, as the Dr. would have it thought? Indeed, St. *Austin* * supposes, that *Adam* before the Fall cou'd have erected his *membrum genitale ad voluntatis nutum*; and that motions of the flesh were perfectly subordinate to his will, like his fingers. But this notion not being orthodox at present, & the loss of this faculty no ways inferring the loss of understanding, I may venture to say, that the Dr.'s description of human-nature in all, but one pair, (and that too, perhaps, but for a day,) is a Libel on the dignity of human-nature, and an high reflection on the Wisdom & goodness of its Author; in placing them, without any fault of theirs, in an unavoidable state of degeneracy & corruption for 1000 years together, & continuing the greatest part still in the same state.

BUT let us see, whether the Dr. has better success with his other arguments, by which he endeavours to curtail the universal goodness of God; and, therefore, I shall take notice of two other things, which he insists on, to shew the gross, & unavoidable ignorance of the Philosophers, in the most momentous points of Religion: The first is, That, †, which „ of all things the best, & wisest of the Philosophers „ were entirely, & unavoidably ignorant of, and yet „ was of the greatest importance for sinful Men to „ know; viz. *The Method, by which such as have erred „ from the right way, and have offended God, may yet „ restore themselves to his favour.* „ And here he concludes, ‡, That there arises from Nature no sufficient comfort to sinners, but an anxious, & endless „ solicitude, about the means of appeasing the Deity.

To answer the Dr, I need only quote what another able Divine, writing on the same subject of Natural,

* *Dr. Civit. Dei, l. 14. c. 23, 24.*

† *Pag. 182.* ‡ *Pag. 183.*

& Reveal'd Religion, says, * „I affirm, it is an Ar-
 „ ticle of Natural Religion, that forgiveness does
 „ certainly follow repentance. If God be a merciful,
 „ & benign Being, he will accept the payment we
 „ are able to make; and not insist on impossible de-
 „ mands, with his frail, bankrupt creatures. No ge-
 „ nerous Man, but will forgive his Enemy, much
 „ more his Child; if he disapproves the wrong he
 „ has done, is really griev'd for it, is desirous to make
 „ amends, even by suffering for the honour of the
 „ person injur'd. How much more shall God forgive
 „ all persons thus dispos'd, & reform'd; since there's
 „ no generosity in Man, but what is, with his nature,
 „ infus'd into him by God.

„ Nor only Mercy, but Wisdom will effectually
 „ dispose God to forgive the penitent, because the
 „ Creature reform'd by penitence is such as it ought
 „ to be, & such as God willeth it; which being so,
 „ it can be no wisdom in God to afflict it unnecessa-
 „ rily. 'Tis not justice, but rage, to punish where the
 „ person is already mended. When we argue thus,
 „ from any of the known and certain attributes of
 „ God, we are as sure of the conclusion, as if the
 „ thing was to be discern'd by sense; since no sensible
 „ thing is more certain, than the attributes of God.

Mr. Lock has the same sentiments, & says, † „ God
 „ had, by the Light of Reason, reveal'd to all Man-
 „ kind, who wou'd make use of that Light, that he
 „ was good, & merciful. The same spark of the di-
 „ vine nature, & knowledge in Man, which making
 „ him a Man, shewed him the Law he was under
 „ as a Man, shewed him also the way of atoning the
 „ merciful, kind, compassionate Author, and Father
 „ of him, & his being, when he had transgressed that
 „ Law. He that made use of this candle of the Lord,
 „ so far as to find what was his duty, cou'd not miss

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* Nye of Nat. and Rev. Relig. p. 85, 86.

† Reason's. of Christianity, &c. p. 255, 256.

to find also the way to reconciliation & forgiveness, when he had fail'd of his Duty. —

THE Law is the eternal, immutable standard of Right : And a part of that Law is, that a Man would forgive, not only his Children, but his Enemies; upon their repentance, asking pardon and amendment. And therefore, he could not doubt, that the Author of this Law, & God of patience & consolation, who is rich in mercy, would forgive his frail offspring; if they acknowledg'd their faults, disapproved the iniquity of their transgressions, begg'd his pardon, & resolv'd in earnest for the future, to conform their actions to this Rule, which they own'd to be just & right. This way of reconciliation, this hope of atonement, the Light of Nature revealed to them.

HAD the Dr. only said, that we can't know from the Light of Nature, that *There's more joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repents, than over ninety nine just persons, who need no repentance*; that, if strictly taken, might, perhaps, be better disputed; but nothing, sure, can be more shocking, than to suppose the unchangeable God, whose nature, and property is ever to forgive, was not, at all times, equally willing to pardon repenting Sinners; and equally willing they should have the satisfaction of knowing it.

IF God's Ways are equal, & he has, at one time as well as another, the same goodness for the Sons of Men, in relation to their eternal happiness; how can we suppose he left all Mankind, for so many ages, & the greatest part, even at present, in a most miserable state of doubt, & uncertainty, about the pardon of sin; & consequently, about the possibility of any Man's being sav'd? If this notion, that even the best, & wisest of Mankind, were, not only absolutely, but most absolutely ignorant of that, which of all things, it was of the greatest importance for Mankind to know, be not inconsistent with the divine goodness, I am at a loss to know what is so.

Is the design of God, in communicating any thing of himself to Men, was their happiness; wou'd not that design have oblig'd him, who, at all times, alike desires their happiness, to have, at all times, alike communicated it to them? If God always acts for the good of his Creatures, what reason can be assign'd, why he shou'd not, from the beginning, have discover'd such things, as make for their good; but defer the doing it till the time of *Tiberius*? since the sooner this was done, the greater wou'd his goodness appear to be: Nay, is it consistent with infinite benevolence, to hide that for many ages, which, he knew, was as useful at first to prevent, as afterwards it cou'd be, to put a stop to any thing he dislik'd.

And, indeed, unless we deny that God, at all times, intended Mankind that happiness, their nature is capable of, we must allow, that, at all times, he has given them the means of obtaining it, by the rules he has prescrib'd them for their conduct; & consequently, these Rules must have been discoverable at all times. For, if God acts upon rational motives, must not the same motives, which oblig'd him to discover any thing that's for the good of Mankind, have oblig'd him to discover every thing that is so; and that too, after the same plain manner: And not do this, as it were, grudgingly, little by little; here a bit, & there a bit; and that to one favourite Nation only, under the veil of types, allegories, &c. and at last, tho' he discover'd some things more plainly, yet it was but to a small part of Mankind, the bulk of them to this day remaining in deplorable ignorance.

ANOTHER Argument the Dr. brings for the undeniable defect of the Light of Nature is, that tho' it is evident from this Light, that God ought to be worshipp'd; yet * , the manner, in which he might be acceptably worshipp'd, the wisest, and best of the Philosophers were intirely, and unavoidably ignorant of.

A. Who can forbear pitying these unhappy Philosophers, indispensably oblig'd to worship God acceptably; & yet, hard fate! unavoidably ignorant how to perform this acceptable worship? But,

If God cou'd not will to be worshipp'd, without willing some way or other, of being worshipp'd; and if he left it to the Light of Nature to discover how he wou'd be worshipp'd, cou'd that be for any other reason, but because it was acceptable to him, to be worshipp'd as that Light directed? Is it not a contradiction, to suppose God wou'd be acceptably worshipp'd, & yet let Men, even the best, be intirely & unavoidably ignorant, how to worship him acceptably? Does not the Light of Nature tell us, that God is a Being of infinite wisdom & goodness; and that all his natural faculties are directed by these two attributes, to serve the purposes of benevolence? how then can we be ignorant, what worship, what service, we are to render him? Can we doubt, if we endeavour to have the same frame of mind, & govern our actions by the same Law of benevolence, whether we shall obtain his favour? since *to imitate him, is to pay him the highest adoration; and to keep his commandments shews the highest veneration.* 'Tis for such reasons as these, that Dr. Steele intirely differs from this learned Author, and says, * „ If we truly understand what „ God is, we can't but apprehend what worship is „ suitable to him, from the eternal congruity & proportion that there is between things & things, as „ obvious to the mind, as sounds & colours are to the ears & eyes.

B. Dr. Clark owns, that † „ Obedience to the „ obligations of Nature, & imitation of the moral attributes of God, the wisest Philosophers easily knew, „ was, undoubtedly, the *most acceptable* service to God; & what he insists upon as necessary, is only some external adoration. A.

* *Christ. Life. P. 2. Vol. 1. Ch. 6. p. 323.*

† *Pag. 178, 179.*

A. BUT since external adoration can't be perform'd, but by external signs, these must be different in different places; because what are marks of respect in one Country, are marks of disrespect in another, or, at least, look ridiculous.

B. THE reason that the Dr. gives, why the wisest Men were intirely, & unavoidably ignorant, how God would be acceptably worshipping'd with external adoration, is, because * *they fell lamentably into the practice of the most foolish Idolatry.*

A. Never any before, call'd the worshipping of Idols, the worshipping of the true God, tho' unacceptably. But however, since you lay such stress on this discourse, I shall consider what the Dr. says; to prove his paradox.

„ *Plato*, says he, † after having deliver'd almost divine truths, concerning the nature, & attributes of the supreme God, weakly advises Men to worship likewise inferior Gods; nor dar'd to condemn the worshipping even of Statues. — ‡ And so he spoil'd the best Philosophy in the world, by adding Idolatry to that worship, which he had wisely, & bravely before prov'd to be due to the Creator of all things. But could he be intirely, & unavoidably ignorant of, what he had bravely & wisely prov'd?

„ *Socrates*, he says, § superstitiously offer'd a Cock to *Esculapius*, unless it was done in mockery to him, looking on death to be his greatest deliverance: „ But since he doubted what *Socrates* intended, why does he instance in him, as one intirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how God was to be acceptably worshipping'd?

„ *Cicero*, he says, ¶ allow'd Men to continue the Idolatry of their Ancestors, advis'd them to conform themselves to the superstitious Religion of their Country. -- In which he fondly contradicts himself, by inexcusably complying with the practices of those Men, whom, in many of his writings, he

* Pag. 179. † *Ibid.* ‡ Pag. 181. § Pag. 179. ¶ Pag. 180.

„ he largely, & excellently proves to be extremely „ foolish, upon the account of those very practices. „ But does this prove any unavoidable ignorance in *Cicero*, in relation to the worship of the true God? But only that he, as a Philosopher, not only knew, but spoke the truth; tho, as a Priest, he thought fit to dissemble. Perhaps, he suppos'd it not prudent, without some such softning expressions, so plainly to attack the reigning Superstition. But,

SINCE the reasoning of the ancient Philosophers fully shew'd their sense, these reflections might have been spar'd; were it but for the sake of some modern Philosophers, whose philosophical Faith is as little reconcileable with the *Credo's* & *Litanies*, they, as Priests, solemnly repeat, and the *Articles* they as solemnly subscribe, as any thing *Cicero*, the Priest, could say in opposition to *Cicero*, the Philosopher; who describes our moral obligations after so beautiful a manner, and by such plain, and irresistible arguments, shews the necessary connexion between Virtue & Happiness, Vice & Misery, as can't but make us highly delighted with the one, and create in us a just aversion to the other.

THAT Dr. had here a fair opportunity, of shewing the absurdity of arguing from what even the best of Men say, when 'tis not safe to talk otherwise. This had been more agreeable to his candor, than taking an handle from hence to expose the Light, & Law of Nature, as well as those great Men (to whom we are infinitely oblig'd, for writing under these disadvantages so freely as they have done) especially *Cicero*, from whom the Fathers have borrow'd their best arguments against Paganism. *Arnobius* says, * that if his Works had been read, as they ought, by the Heathens, there had been no need of Christian Writers. And in answer to those *Gentiles*, who seeing the use the Christians made of them, were for soliciting the

Senators

* *Arnob. contra Gentes*. l. 3. p. 120.

Senate to burn, or otherwise suppress them: He says, *That were, not to defend the Gods, but to fear the testimony of Truth.* Which Pagan method has not only been us'd often since, by all who fear'd the testimony of truth, to the loss of an immense treasure of learning; but they have improv'd it too, and been for burning of Men, as well as Books; and thereby introduc'd a Superstition more abominable than Paganism. And give me leave to add, that

- In Old Rome, as long as there was civil liberty; there was an intire liberty of conscience; & even the Priests of the National Church, provided they comply'd with its ceremonies, had no speculative *Creds*, or *Articles*, to subscribe, but were intirely free to maintain what opinions they pleas'd. Of this, *Cicero* is a remarkable instance; who, in his Book *de Divinatione*, exposes the superstition of his own Countrymen, & ridicules those miracles, with which the Annals of the Church-Priests were fill'd: And he, tho' a Priest himself, every where treats his Brethren with great freedom; and in his address to them, speaking of an ambitious, intreaguing Priest, who would hide his malice under the cover of Religion, (for some such there have been in all Religions,) says, * „If *Publius* „ *Claudius* is to defend his pestilent, & deadly Ministry „ by the sacred name of divine Religion, when 'tis „ impossible for him to do it by human equity, 'tis „ high time to look for other ceremonies, other Ministers of the immortal Gods, & other Interpreters „ of Religion. „ But to return,

THE Dr. having thus expos'd the Light of Nature, and as he thinks, shewn its undeniable defects in the persons of these Philosophers; demands what grounds our modern Deists have to imagine, that if they themselves had liv'd without the Light of the Gospel, they shou'd have been wiser than *Plato*, *Socrates*, and *Cicero*. But sure no great wisdom is requir'd to know

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Orat. pro Demo sua ad Pontifices. c. x.

the Law of Nature; was it but half as plain, as the Dr. from Bishop Cumberland, has represented it; and which no well-meaning Gentile, who *did by nature the things contain'd in the Law*, could be ignorant of. And,

I am surpris'd to find the Dr. arguing as if that Law, „ * which is a most perfect Rule to the most perfect „ Being, is not perfect enough for his imperfect „ Creatures; „ tho' their whole perfection consists in imitating him, & governing their actions by the same Rule: A Rule, which, it can't be deny'd, had Mankind govern'd their actions by it, would have render'd them as perfect as their nature was capable of. I shou'd be glad to know, why this Rule has lost its virtue, & will not now render Men as acceptable to God as ever. But could we suppose a God of infinite perfection, might ordain an imperfect, or insufficient Rule, for the actions of his Creatures; or, which comes to the same, afford them no other Light for the discovery of it, but what had such undeniable defects, as made them incapable of knowing their duty: nor was sufficient to hinder them from falling into, and continuing from Age to Age, in a deplorable state of corruption; I wou'd ask, whether God did this knowingly, or ignorantly, not foreseeing the consequences? To suppose the first, is to make God act out of spite, & hatred to his Creatures, in bringing them into being, and making that being a Curse to them: Or if the last, why were not these defects supply'd as soon as discover'd? Or, were they not discover'd by infinite Wisdom till these latter times; & then reveal'd only to a small number, tho' all Mankind had equal need of them? And then too, so imperfectly, that Men have ever since been in continual quarrels, about the meaning of most of those things, which are suppos'd to have been added, to supply the defects of the Law of Nature?

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WHAT human Legislator, if he found a defect in his Laws, & thought it for the good of his Subjects to add new Laws, would not promulgate them to all his People? Or, what Parent would act after so partial a manner, as the Dr, in a self-confounding scheme, supposes the common Parent of Mankind has done? And not let all his Children know, as soon as possible, what was for their common good? especially, if they were in such a forlorn, & miserable condition, as he represents all Mankind to have been in, almost as soon as created.

THE Dr. very rightly observes, that *, „ Even „ among Men, there's no earthly Father, but, in those „ things he esteems his own excellencies, desires, & „ expects to be imitated by his Children; how much „ more, *says he*, is it necessary, that God, who is infinitely far from being subject to passions, and variableness, as frail Men are, and has an infinitely „ tenderer, & heartier concern for the happiness of „ his Creatures, than mortal Men can have for the „ welfare of their Posterity, must desire to be imitated by his Creatures in those perfections, which „ are the foundation of his own unchangeable happiness. „ How far this invariableness in God, and his great love for his Creatures, is consistent with that scheme of things, which the Dr. has hitherto advanc'd, has, I think, been made appear. We will now examine what he adds, to shew that God has an infinitely more tender, and hearty concern for the happiness of his Creatures, than mortal Men can have for the welfare of their Posterity: What he says, is, that † „ both the „ necessities of Men, & their natural notions of God „ gave them reasonable ground to expect, and hope „ for a divine Revelation, to recover Mankind out „ of their universally degenerate estate, into one suitable to the original excellence of their nature.

And

And that * „ it was agreeable to the dictates of Nature, & right Reason, to hope for such a divine Revelation; † That it is agreeable to the natural hopes & expectations of Men, that is, of right Reason duly improv'd, to suppose God making some particular Revelation of his Will to Mankind. - - „ And that this was most suitable to the divine attributes; „ yet notwithstanding these, and a great many other fine sayings to the same purpose, he denies that God was oblig'd to make such a Revelation: But, with submission, what other reason have we to say, God is oblig'd to do any one thing whatever, but that 'tis agreeable to the natural notions we have of his wisdom & goodness, & to the dictates of Nature & Reason, for him so to do; and if the necessities of Mankind have always been as great, and the goodness of God always the same, wou'd not these oblige him to have prescrib'd an immediate remedy to the disease; & not to have deferr'd it for four thousand years together, & then apply'd it but to a few, tho' all had equal need of it? And a need occasion'd (as the Dr. supposes) by God himself, in not affording them any other light, but what was insufficient to answer the end for which it was giv'n.

B. THE Dr. supposes, that this Revelation was not the effect of God's *Justice*; ‡ for then it must needs have been giv'n in all Ages, and to all Nations; *but of mercy, & condescending goodness.*

A. CAN a Being be denominated merciful, & good, who is so only to a few; but cruel, & unmerciful to the rest? And certainly, all the arguments the Dr. can urge from the necessities of Mankind; & the abundant Goodness of God, will equally prove, that this Revelation, did it teach a new Religion; shou'd be universal, as that it shou'd be at all. But,

If Revelation was absolutely necessary to recover Mankind, out of their universally degenerate, & corrupted

* Contents. pag. 261. † Pag. 274. ‡ Pag. 215.

rupted state, & replace them in a state suitable to the original dignity, and excellency of their nature; and more effectually to do this, there was instituted an Order of Men, who were to be, as the Dr. calls them, * *the Instruments of conveying extraordinary assistances for this purpose*; must not Revelation have had its intended effect; and made Christians, especially where these Instruments of conveying extraordinary assistances are in great numbers, and in great authority, much more perfect, & excellent, than Men cou'd possibly be, when under times of unavoidable corruption? And yet

THE Dr. having taken a large passage from *Cicero*, where the Orator very rhetorically describes the great corruptions of his time, & assigns the causes thereof, makes this remark, † *That a livelier description of the present corrupt state of human-nature is not easily to be met with*; which, I think, is sufficiently owning, that human-nature at present is far from being exalted to so high a state of perfection, or in the least mended. And tho' the Dr. frequently quotes *Cicero* for the support of his opinion, yet *Cicero* is far from supposing any such defect in Nature: For a proof of which, I need only mention these two short passages. ‡ 'Tis impossible to err, as long as we follow the guidance of Nature. -- § There's no Man, who following the conduct of Nature, but may arrive at perfection. And the Dr. himself quotes a passage from him, to shew that Nature has not been wanting to declare her mind: ¶ *Multis signis natura declarat quid velit*. And it might be as easily shewn, he as much mistakes the meaning of those other Philosophers he quotes. And indeed, how cou'd any Men, except they had a very absurd Hypothesis to serve, assert, that any thing cou'd be Mens duty, they were unavoidably ignorant of? Yet,

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* Pag. 166. † Pag. 158. ‡ De Leg. l. i. § *ibid.*
¶ Pag. 42.

THE Dr, to prove this invincible ignorance in the Gentile World, has frequent recourse to the authority of *Lactantius*, a primitive Father, without shewing that he had a greater regard for truth than other Fathers: And I am afraid the Dr. himself seems here not much to regard it, in maiming a sentence of *Lactantius*; * *Maximum itaque argumentum est, philosophiam neque ad sapientiam tendere, neque ipsam esse sapientiam; quod mysterium ejus, barba tantum celebratur, & pallio.* Whereas the whole Sentence runs thus, † *Non est ergo sapientia, si ab hominum cætu abhorret; quoniam, si sapientia homini data est, sine ulla discriminè omnibus data est; ut nemo sit prorsus, qui eam capere non possit. At illi [Philosophi] virtutem humano generi datam sic amplexantur, ut soli omnium publico bono frui velle videantur; tam invidi, quam si velint deligare oculos, aut effodere cæteris, ne solem videant. - - Quod si natura hominis sapientia capax est, oportuit officios, & rusticos & mulieres, & omnes denique qui humanam formam gerunt, doceri ut sapiant; populumque ex omni lingua, & conditione, & sexu, & ætate constare.* Then follows what the Dr. quoted.

THIS had been a full answer to all the Dr. had taken from him, if not to all the Dr. has said on this head, & it plainly shews, this Father here thought, that Wisdom, as it was design'd for all, was within the reach of all; & that which the lowest of Mankind cou'd not attain, was neither Wisdom, nor Virtue; and that those Philosophers, who wou'd confine this universal light to themselves, were as envious, as if they wou'd exclude others from the light of the Sun. And that this alone was a sufficient proof, that their Philosophy consisted only in the beard, & the cloak.

THIS Father asserts nothing here, but what the wisest of Men had long before own'd, in saying, that ‡ *Wisdom is easily seen of them that love her, and found*

* Pag. 189. † *Lactant. Inst. Divin. l. 3. c. 25. N. 2-6. Edit. Cellar.* ‡ *Wisd. of Solomon 6. 12. & 15.*

of such as seek her. — She goes about seeking such as are worthy of her, shows herself favourable to them in the way, and meets them in every thought. And,

WHAT impartial Man, who has compar'd the former, & present condition of Mankind, can think the World much mended since the times of *Tiberius*? or tho' ever so well vers'd in Church-History, can, from the conduct of Christians, find, that they are arriv'd to any higher state of perfection, than the rest of Mankind; who are suppos'd to continue in their degeneracy, & corruption? What was the opinion of a late eminent Philosopher, as well as Divine, is plain, by his saying, * *Si resurgerent Philosophi & Gentilium sapientes, & perlustrato orbe à nobis quærerent, quid profuerit humano generi religio Christiana, quoad mores & vitæ probitatem? quoad pacem & bonum publicum? nos utique appellatis Barbaros per opprobrium: sed nobis Barbaris quid præstatis vos Christiani?*

Monsieur Leibnitz, a great Statesman as well as Philosopher, in comparing the Christians at present, with the Infidels of China, does not scruple to give the preference to the latter, in relation to all moral Virtues; — and after having said of them, † *Dici enim non potest, quam pulchre omnia ad tranquillitatem publicam, ordinemque hominum inter se, ut quam minimum sibi ipsi incommodent, supra aliarum gentium leges apud Sineses sine ordinata.* He adds, *Certe talis nostrarum rerum mihi videtur esse conditio, eliscentibus in immensum corruptelis, ut propemodum necessarium videatur missionariis Sinesium ad nos mitri, qui Theologia naturalis usum prætinque nos doceant, quemadmodum nos illis mittimus qui Theologiam eos doceant revelatam.* And the learned Huetius tells us, that ‡ „ There's such a constant agreement between the Chinese themselves, „ & their neighbours, as they seem to be all but one „ Family., „ And,

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* *Burnet de Fide & Offic. Christianorum.* p. 98.

† *Præfatio ad novissima Sinica.* ‡ *Alnetan quest. l. 3. p. 419.*

Navarette, a Chinese Missionary, agrees with Leibnitz; & says, that * „It is God's special Providence, that „the *Chineſes* did not know what is done in *Chriſtendom*; for if they did, there wou'd be never a „Man among them, but wou'd ſpit in our faces. „And he adds, with reſpect to the manners of thoſe *European* Chriſtians, who come into the *Eaſt Indies*, & of the Converts made by the *Miſſionaries*; „That „there are few converted in thoſe parts, where they „converſe with the *Europeans*; and when it happens „that any are converted, they prove ſo bad, it were „better they had never been baptiz'd. And I am afraid, 'tis much the ſame in relation to the *Weſt Indies*. And, BISHOP Kidder ſays of Chriſtians in general, „That were a wiſe Man to chooſe his Religion by „the lives of thoſe who profeſs it, perhaps, Chriſtiani- „ty wou'd be the laſt Religion he wou'd chooſe. „And who, that has been abroad, and compar'd the Lives of Believers & Unbelievers, does not ſay the ſame things?

AND Dr. Clark himſelf, in the Diſcourſe we are now conſidering, has ſufficiently prov'd, that Man is naturally a ſocial Creature, full of benevolence, pity, & tenderneſs; and he ſays, that † „Reason, which „is the proper nature of Man, can never lead Men „to any thing elſe than univerſal love, & benevolence; and that „wars, hatred, & violence can never ariſe, „but from extreme corruptions. „Tho' there's no part of Natural Religion, but highly tends to improve this ſocial, and benign temper; yet alas! we find, that what, in moſt places, paſſes for the Chriſtian Religion, if not the chiefſt part of it, has transform'd this ſocial, & benign Creature into one fierce, & cruel; and made him act with ſuch rage & fury againſt thoſe, who never did, or deſign'd him the leaſt injury, as cou'd not have enter'd into the hearts of Men to conceive,

* NAVARETTE'S *Acco. of China*, in *Churchill's Collection* of Voyag. V. I. I. 2. c. 13. † *Pag.* 107.

ceive, even tho' they were in the Dr's unavoidable state of degeneracy & corruption.

If People are once persuaded, that what their Priests call *Schism*, *Heresy*, *Infidelity*, &c. tho' held with the utmost sincerity, are damnable Sins, it wants not much skill to persuade them to hate those mortally, whom God, they are already persuaded, will hate to all eternity; and that, as they regard the preservation of the Orthodox Faith, & the saving their own Souls, & the Souls of all that are dear to them, they ought to take the most effectual methods to root out all such damnable opinions. 'Tis upon this common principle, that the *Inquisition* is establish'd; and the *Papists*, to do them justice, act up to it; tho' perhaps, even among them, there are some Lay-men, where Nature is too hard for Principles.

If once pernicious opinions are believ'd to be contain'd in any Revelation, they will have the same effect, as if really there. Has not the belief of the judicial power of the Clergy, as to the next world, and their independent power in this world, done the same mischief, as if they had really been contain'd in Scripture? And if they, who maintain these, & other as vile maxims, have got possession of Mens Minds, by ingrossing (not to mention other arts) the teaching the young, as well as instructing the old; what lets than a new Revelation can expose their expositions, or explain away their explanations of the present Revelation, which have prov'd more fatal to the happiness of Mankind, than all the superstitions of the *Pagan* World. Had the *Bees* speech & reason, wou'd they, think you, from age to age, have continu'd to give the best part of their honey to such haranguing Drones, who for the most part, employ'd their talents, to set not only Hive against Hive, but the *Bees* of the same Hive against one another, for such things as had no other tendency, than to make the idle Drones lord it over the industrious *Bees*? But not to deviate,

We have no great reason to hope, it will ever be so well with Mankind, but that there will always be too much room for such arguments, as the Dr. urges from the corruptions of Mankind, for new Revelations. Have not Impostors always made use of this plea? Was it not on the carnality of the primitive Orthodox Christians, that the spiritual *Montanus* founded his new Gospel; which divided the Christian World for so small time, & made the celebrated *Tertullian* say; * That „ the Law & Prophets were to be look'd on as „ the Infancy, & the Gospel, as it were, the Youth, „ but that there was no compleat perfection to be „ found, but in the instruction of the Holy Ghost, „ who spoke by *Montanus*.

AND it was the ill lives of the Professors of Christianity, as 'tis own'd by Christian as well as Arabick Writers, which prepar'd the way for that success which *Mahomet* met with, whose Religion, as it gain'd in a short time, more Profelites than any other, so it is still gaining ground: For which Father *Maracci*, who has so well translated, and makes such just reflections on the *Alchoran*, gives this odd reason: † *Habet nimirum hac Superstitio (Mahumedana) quicquid plausibile, ac probabile in Christiana Religione reperitur, & quæ Nature legi ac lumini consentanea videntur. Mystéria illa Fidei nostræ, quæ primo aspectu, incredibilia, & impossibilia apparent; & præcipue, quæ nimis ardua humane natura censentur, penitus excludit. Hinc moderni Idolorum Cultores, facilius ac promptius Saracenicam, quam Evangelicam Legem amplectuntur.* But,

THE Dr. is so far from solving the difficulties attending this scheme, that he quits it, and artfully introduces a new scene: and tho' he had before laid it down as a most evident truth, that God does nothing by meer will & arbitrariness, yet this new Hypothesis is wholly built on it, in supposing, that in these latter times,

* See *Reeve's Prelim. Disc. to Tertul. Apoleget.* p. 129.

† *Marrac. Pref. ad Predrom.* p. 4.

times, God intended to give some Men, without regard to their merits, an higher degree of happiness than he did the rest; and to shew how consistent this is with Reason, he says, * „As God was not oblig'd „ to make all his Creatures equal, or to make Men „ Angels, or to endow all Men with the same capacities & faculties, so he was not bound to make „ all Men capable of the *same degree*, or the *same kind* „ of happiness; or to afford all Men the very same „ means & opportunities of obtaining it.

B. BUT how comes this to be missing the scene, & introducing a new Hypothesis?

A. BECAUSE his former supposes Men living & dying in a deprav'd, corrupted, degenerate, & impious state, incapable of reformation; whereas in this all Men are allow'd to have, in general, the means of attaining to a certain degree of happiness hereafter; whilst Christians alone have in particular the means & opportunities of gaining this higher degree, & kind of happiness.

THO' infinite variety of Creatures, & consequently inequality, is necessary to shew the great extent of the divine goodness, which plainly appears from the beautiful, and well form'd System of the World, & the due subordination of things, all contriv'd for the happiness of the whole; yet sure, it does not from thence follow, that God will not either here, or hereafter, bestow on the rational Creation, all the happiness their nature is capable of, since that was the end why God gave it them.

CAN God, who equally beholds all the Dwellers on Earth, free from partiality and prejudice, make some People his favourites, without any consideration of their merits, and merely because they believe certain opinions taught in that Country where they happen to be born; while others, far the greater number, shall, from Age to Age, want this favour, not upon

the account of their demerits, but because destin'd to live in places, where God, who always acts from motives of infinite Wisdom & Goodness, thought it best to conceal from them all such opinions. What can more represent God as an arbitrary, and partial Being, than thus to suppose, that he vouchsafes not to afford, the greatest part of Mankind, the happiness, of which himself had made them capable?

MUST not every one perceive, that this narrow notion is inconsistent with the character of a Being of unlimited benevolence? Is not infinite Goodness always the same? How then can it, in these last days, make such inequality among Men? Is not this supposing inconsistency in the divine conduct? Is not this notion repugnant to the natural idea we have of the divine Goodness? As likewise to those express texts of Scripture, which declare *God is no respecter of Persons; that Every one, of what Nation soever, shall be rewarded according to his works; And that Men are accepted according to what they have, & not according to what they have not?*

IF God, as the Dr. contends, will judge Men as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational, must not the judgment of the most righteous Judge, hold an exact proportion to the use they have made of their Reason? And if Mens state in this life be a state of probation, and for that cause they are made moral Agents, capable of knowing good from evil, & consequently, of doing every thing that's fit to be done, must they not be dealt with hereafter, according to the use they have made of their moral agency?

How can Men be sure, if God acts thus partially, that this partiality may not even now be in favour of other countries, than those they live in, & of other notions, which not flowing from the Nature & Reason of Things, we may be wholly unacquainted with? If Men may lose any part of God's favour for impossibilities, or not observing such Rules as he never gave

gave them, where shall we stop? Cou'd I think God so partial & prejudic'd, as most Sects, for their own sake, represent him, how cou'd I admire, love, and adore him, as I ought? Nay, how can any, who have such unworthy notions of God, be certain, God's prejudice and partiality will be in their favour? If you admit any one imperfection in God, how can you be sure of his veracity immutability, or any other perfection whatever?

Tho' Dr. Clark contends for what terminates in this gross partiality, as if the whole of Christianity was founded on it; yet some of our Divines, of the first rank too, are of a different opinion; from two of which, I'll give you the following quotations.

„ God's Goodness & Mercy (*says Mr. Wharton*) *
 „ were, from all Ages, equal & uniform; his Justice
 „ always impartial and universal, in excluding none
 „ from his favour, but for reasons common to them
 „ with all Mankind. -- The universality, & impar-
 „ tiality of the divine Justice & Favour, is founded
 „ on the excellency of the divine Nature: which can't
 „ be suppos'd to want that, which above all is ne-
 „ cessary for the government of the World, impartial
 „ Justice in the dispensing of rewards & punishments.
 „ -- All Men were equally created by God, and if
 „ we respect that alone, all have an equal title to his
 „ favour. -- Otherwise we cou'd not but conceive
 „ injustice in God; nor were it possible to reconcile
 „ such a partiality with his infinite excellency. The
 „ reason why *God is no respecter of persons*, is said to be,
 „ because *There is no iniquity with the Lord.* † All
 „ reasonable preference of one Person to another,
 „ must be founded on some just cause; otherwise it
 „ wou'd be trifling, & fond, nay, even unjust, and
 „ foolish. -- Far be it from us, to imagine any such
 „ imperfections in God, in him there is no variableness,

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* Wharton's Vol. of Serm. pag. 305. &c.

† 2 Chron. 23. 49.

„ or shadow of change. -- He ever proceeds upon
 „ fixed, and immoveable principles, which equally
 „ serve for all actions & causes. -- God has fix'd
 „ most impartial Laws of government, which uni-
 „ versally affect all the members of Mankind. -- It is
 „ so pleasing a delusion, to fancy themselves dear to
 „ God in an extraordinary manner, & for unaccount-
 „ table reasons, that 'tis no wonder many have been
 „ tempted to entertain such a charming error. --
 „ This seduc'd the *Jews*. -- This prejudice has cor-
 „ rupted great numbers of Christians. -- Is God the
 „ God of the *Jews* & *Christians* only? Is he not the
 „ God of the *Gentiles* also? Are not his Attributes
 „ always unalterable, & the influence of these equally
 „ deriv'd down to all his Creatures?

THAT celebrated Preacher, Dr. *Ibbett*, affirms,
 that * „ 'Tis not our being of any Nation, or any Sect,
 „ members of any particular Church, or Society,
 „ that will intitle us to God's favour; but our working
 „ the work of God, living up to that light & know-
 „ ledge which he has afforded us; and being most
 „ punctual, & exact in the discharge of those moral
 „ duties, which all Mankind, who have any true
 „ notions of God and Religion, have ever thought
 „ themselves oblig'd to. „ -- Again, † Wherever Men
 „ fear God, and love one another, they will be ac-
 „ cepted without any regard to their country, or na-
 „ tion; their tribe, or family; for this is what God
 „ would bring all People to, *from the rising of the Sun*
 „ *unto the going down thereof*. This is that inward
 „ temper of mind, & that outward practice of life,
 „ which he requires, & which, wherever he meets it,
 „ will find acceptance with him.

THE contrary is a notion, which lays a foundation
 for everlasting persecutions: for if Men flatter them-
 selves, that they, upon the account of their particular
 systems, are the Favourites of Heaven, & that others
 shall

* *Serm. Vol. I. pag. 207.* † *Pag. 211.*

shall want, even to eternity, many degrees of their happiness; will not that oblige them, as they love their Children, Families, Friends, Neighbours, & Relations, to use any means, come into any persecuting measures, to prevent such opinions from spreading, as they imagine, wou'd deprive them of that degree of happiness, which otherwise they might ever enjoy? And is it not chiefly owing to this absurdity, that even the most moderate of the different Sects, are far from treating one another with that benevolence, which the common ties of humanity require.

DID Men believe, that all who were equally sincere, were equally acceptable to God, there cou'd be no pretence for the least partiality, much less for persecution, either positive, or negative. Nor cou'd any Man love another the less, for the widest difference in opinions. And then of course, Mens indignation wou'd be wholly bent agzinst immorality, discoverable by the Light of Nature, which, now alas! is but too often protected by zeal for mere speculations.

THIS principle, and this alone, wou'd cause universal love, & benevolence, among the whole Race of Mankind; and did it prevail, must soon produce a new, & glorious face of things; or, in the Scripture phrase, *a new Heaven, & a new Earth*; & wou'd free Men from that miserable perplexity, in which the fear of mistaking in speculative matters involves them.

WHAT assurance, upon any other ground, can even the generality of Christians have, that they do not err most dangerously: when they consider what divisions there have been; from the beginning, among Christians about such points? And that the Guides of their own Churches, even the most able, tho' they agree in saying, *Their Fundamentals are plain*, have not always the same set of *Fundamentals*, & when they have, widely differ in explaining them: Can they, I say, who consider this, be certain, that it is not the fear of loss of preferment, or some other political reasons, that keep up any sort
of

of verbal agreement among them, even in things own'd to be of the highest consequence; and which, as such, are plac'd in their *Creeeds & Articles*? Consider with yourself, what comfort, what satisfaction, it must give a Man, especially, on his death-bed, to be certain, he is not accountable for any errors in opinion, if he has, according as his circumstances permitted, done his best to discover the Will of God.

Dr. *Frideaux* says, * „ The main arguments *Mahomet* made use of, to delude Men into the imposture, were his promises, & his threats, being those which easily work on the affections of the Vulgar. If the bulk of Mankind are so easily deluded by threats and promises, when join'd to opinions as absurd as those of *Mahomet*, can there be any other way to avoid their being deluded in proportion to the greatness of those promises & threats, but by annexing them, not to any set of opinions, but to sincerity & insincerity? For here, the only effect they can have, is to make Men judge without prejudice, & partiality.

The present Bishop of *Sarum* says, † „ God is just, equal, and good; and as sure as he is, so he can't put the salvation and happiness of any Man, upon what he has not put it in the power of any Man, on Earth to be intirely satisfy'd of. And much less say I, can a just, equal, & good God put the salvation, or any part of the happiness of the greatest part of Mankind, upon that, of which, instead of being intirely satisfy'd, they are intirely ignorant. Is it possible, a mistaken Christian can have a title to God's favour, & a Man of another Religion not have the same title, when that sincerity, on which the title depends, is common to them both? ‡ „ If the favour of God, as the Bishop says, follows sincerity, as such; & equally follows every degree of sincerity; must not Men of all Religions whatever, if equally sincere, have the same

* *Life of Mahomet*, pag. 25. Edit. 7. 8vo.

† *Prefero*, pag. 78. ‡ *Ibid.* pag. 91.

same title to be equally favour'd by God? Who is the only infallible judge of their sincerity, in the use of those talents, whether great, or small, he has endow'd them with.

Mr. *Chillingworth* was so far from thinking involuntary errors crimes, that he thought it criminal to ask pardon for them; and says, * „ That would be to „ impute to God the strange Tyranny of requiring „ bricks, where he has giv'n no straw; of expecting „ to gather, where he has not srow'd; to reap, where „ he sow'd not; of being offended with us for not „ doing, what he knew we could not do., And,

THE *Romanists* themselves, tho' they own the common People can have but an imperfect knowledge, of what their infallible Church requires; yet say, that „ a disposition to receive, & an endeavour to understand what it teaches, is sufficient., And shall not the *Protestants* allow as much to such a disposition, in relation to the will of God, as the *Papists* do, to the will of Man? But since there are some, to whom these notions about sincerity, will appear shocking; for their sakes, I will quote a Divine, whom they have in a manner idoliz'd: I mean the famous Mr. *Lesley*, who says, † „ *In the beginning God created Man, & left him „ in the hands of his own Counsel. (Eccles. 15. 14.)* „ He set life & Death, Blessing & Cursing for him to „ choose; and God will bless, or curse him, according „ to what he has set before him; whether by Revelation, or his own natural reason only: And who is „ Judge of this but God, who always knows the sincerity of any Man's intentions, & what endeavours „ he has us'd towards the right informing his Judgment?

In a word, this is so evident a truth, that there are none, but who, with the Bishop of *London*, say, ‡ „ Christianity requires no further favour, than a fair „ & impartial inquiry into the grounds, & doctrines of

* Answer to the Pref. of *Charity maintain'd*. S. 16.

† *Lesley* of private judgm. p. 221. ‡ *Pesb. Letter*. p. 54.

„ of it; „ even while they are designing the further favours of *Fines, Pillories, & imprisonment, &c.* But to return to the Dr.

I wou'd be glad to know, whether the greater degree of happiness, from which Dr. *Clark* wou'd exclude the rest of Mankind, belongs to all those innumerable Sects, that go under the name of Christians; or to one Sect, by virtue of its peculiar fundamentals; or else to all Christians, who, tho' ever so much mistaken, sincerely endeavour to find out the Will of God? If the Dr. says the latter, he can't think this favour depends on any set of notions, but on sincerity, & consequently, must equally belong to all that are equally sincere. But allowing that Christians are to be rewarded above others, equally sincere, yet if they are likewise subject to be punish'd above others for their mistakes, even about such abstruse notions, as divide the most eminent Men of the same most eminent Church, such as Dr. *Waterland*, & Dr. *Clark*; nay, Dr. *Clark*, in some editions of his Book, & himself in other editions; where then, is the great advantage of the Dr's *Hypothesis*? But,

IF Christians are to be punish'd hereafter, for not observing such things, as the happiness of Mankind in general does not depend on, God, certainly, is far from being partial in their favour; if not, where is the difference?

B. BUT does not the Dr. raise an argument, from Mens different capacities and abilities in this life, for their having different degrees of happiness hereafter?

A. THO' Men here have different capacities, yet if that depends on bodily organs, all Souls may in Heaven have equal capacities. But even this supposition will not serve his purpose, except the wisest of the Philosophers had not abilities equal to the meanest Christian; and so (allowing a proportion between happiness & abilities) were naturally incapable of the same degree, or kind of happiness. But,

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THE Dr. himself seems conscious of the weakness, even of this new *Hypothesis*; since he, after he had us'd it, to get rid of a trouble some objection, straight quits it in saying, * „ That as no Man ever deny'd, „ but that the benefit of Christ's death extended backward, to those who liv'd before his appearance in „ the world, so no one can prove, but the same benefit may extend itself forward to those, who never „ heard of his appearance, tho' they liv'd after it. „ If both these, tho' knowing nothing of Christ, or his death, reap the benefit of his death; what more can the most perfect Believer expect? So that even on this supposition, the Dr. must have own'd, that all Men, living up to that light God has giv'n them, are upon a level, in relation to their future happiness.

AND indeed, if Sinners, since the coming of Christ are not to be sav'd without repentance & amendment, & Sinners, at all times, were to be sav'd on these terms, or else cou'd not be sav'd at all; must not repentance & amendment, which suppose a knowledge of what was to be repented of, & amended, put all Mankind, at all times, upon a level, with relation to their future happiness? Can any thing be more evident, than that, if doing evil is the only foundation of God's displeasure, ceasing to do evil, & doing the contrary, must take away that displeasure. As long as Men continue in their sins, they must continue the proper objects of God's resentment; but when they, forsaking their sins, act a part suitable to their rational nature, they of course become the proper objects of his approbation. And this, sure, can't be deny'd, except you suppose, Christ, who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, propos'd some other way of reconciling them to God, than by persuading them to *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*; or, in other words, by obliging them to live up to the eternal, & universal Law of Righteousness.

THO;

THO' the Dr. says no more than our Articles affirm, viz. that *,, the oblation of Christ once made, ,, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole World, both original, & actual; ,, yet I wish the Dr. had been more explicit, & told us, what benefit those who never heard of Christ's appearance, cou'd gain by his death.

B. TH E Dr. says, † that ,, Christ dy'd, to shew God's ,, irreconcilable hatred to sin, and to vindicate the ,, honour of his Laws.

A. THESE reasons, sure, cou'd never influence those, who never heard of Christ; or, if they had, perhaps, wou'd have been so perverse, as not to imagine, that pardoning the guilty, & punishing the innocent, cou'd either shew irreconcilable enmity to guilt, or love for innocence; and perhaps, govern'd by prejudices, might think very odd of a King, who, tho' he freely pardon'd his repenting Rebels, yet shou'd cause his most loyal, & only Son to be put to death, to shew his hatred to rebellion, and to vindicate the honour of those Laws, which forbid putting an innocent Person to death; or any Person to be any way instrumental to his own death. much more to sacrifice himself. Cou'd these Philosophers, who did not imagine any virtue in sacrificing of beasts, ‡ to wash away the sins of Men, easily conceive, a human sacrifice, which they believ'd human-nature abhor'd, to be an expiation for sins? Or, that sins freely pardon'd, cou'd want any expiation? Or, that all was mere mercy, and pure forgiveness, after a full equivalent paid, and adequate satisfaction giv'n?

B. TH I S, indeed, seems to me as great a mystery, as that the same God shou'd receive satisfaction from, and give satisfaction to the same God; and that the same God, who thus receives, and gives satisfaction, shou'd neither give, or receive any satisfaction; since the Holy Ghost, the same God with God the Father, &

* Article 31. † Pag. 259, 260. ‡ Pag. 206, 287.

& God the Son, neither gives, or receives any satisfaction.

THO' I have omitted several things, which well deserve to be criticis'd; yet, I think, I have said enough to shew the inconsistency of the Dr's scheme; and the weakness of all those arguments, by which he attempts to destroy the all-sufficiency, absolute perfection, plainness, & perspicuity of the Law of Nature, which he had before so fully demonstrated. Who cou'd expect, after we had been told, that as God governs all his own actions by the eternal Rule of Reason, so all his rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves in all theirs, by the same eternal Rule: A Rule too, own'd to be so plain, that the *Reason of all Men every where naturally, & necessarily assents to it*: Who, I say, after these, & a number of other such expressions, cou'd imagine, that all this shou'd be unsaid, and the utmost art employ'd, to shew the imperfection, insufficiency, obscurity, & uncertainty of the Light of Nature; and that by reason of its many defects, all Mankind, from age to age, were in an unavoidable state of corruption? And that, even those few Men, who made it their business to study Natural Religion, were intirely ignorant of some doctrines, absolutely necessary for the reformation of Mankind? Nay, that they were (here the Dr, perhaps, describes his own conduct;) „ like Men wandering in the wide sea, without knowing whither to go, or which way to „ take, or having any Guide to conduct them? „ And, in support of his *Hypothesis*, make no scruple to represent God, not alike good at all times & places; & to have acted for many ages with so little foresight, as to give Mankind no other light for their conduct, than such, as disabl'd them from answering that end; for which it was giv'n: And afterward, with so little goodness, as when he saw this defect, still to continue the greatest part of Mankind in that dismal state of darkness, in which all before were involv'd? And then,

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after he had made the most of this strange *Hypothesis*, to quit it for the sake of another, no less strange? And, tho' he had declar'd, that God does nothing in the government of the World, out of mere will & arbitrariness; yet to suppose, that God acts thus with his rational Creatures; and without regard to merit, arbitrarily designs Christians a greater degree of happiness than others? And at last quit too, even this *Hypothesis*, by supposing all Men, tho' they never heard of Christ's death, to be upon a level, in relation to any benefits receiv'd from it? And, I may add,

WHEN Men consider, how often this Discourse has been reprinted; & review'd, by a Man, own'd to be as great a Master of Reason, as ever appear'd in print; & withal, both a subtil *Metaphysician*, and excellent *Mathematician*; an acute *Philosopher*, as well as a deep *Divine*; one, who never fails to exhaust the subject he handles: when Men, I say, consider all this, will they not be apt to cry? *Si pergamus dextra, &c.*

B. I must own; you have produc'd several weighty Arguments; many of them new, at least to me; to prove that Religion was, & always must be invariably the same: But since you go out of the common road, & the path you take, is scarce at all trodden, you must expect, it will be said of you, as of some modern Writers, that you are better at pulling down, than building up.

A. WHEN any notion, in defence of which people have little to say, is attack'd; they usually cry, *Why will you pull down, except you build up?* When in reality, error must be remov'd, in order to make way for truth: You must pull down one, before you can build up the other. But here, I hope, there's no room for that objection; because, as nothing but rubbish is remov'd, nothing but what is either inconsistent with, or, at least, takes off from, the full exercise of piety, & virtue; so every thing is advanc'd, which tends to pro-

promote the honour of God, & the happiness of human societies. And, I may add, that as, in attacking the superstition of any one party, all the rest would think me in the right; so here all parties, without coming into the *Hypotheses* of their adversaries, may, by equally receding from those arbitrary things they have brought into Religion, come to an happy agreement.

For my part, I think, there's none who wish well to Mankind, but must likewise wish this *hypothesis* to be true: & can there be a greater proof of its truth, than that it is, in all its parts, so exactly calculated for the good of Mankind, that either to add to, or take from it, will be to their manifest prejudice. And, as Bishop *Chandler* remarks, *,, They are de-
 ceivers, & true enemies to Mankind, who do not
 teach a Religion most worthy of God, most friendly
 to society, most helpful to government, and most
 beneficial to every individual;,, what need we run
 to his *Jewish Rabbies*, or any other *Rabbies*, to discover
 this true Religion? If 'tis by this test, that our Reason
 must judge of the truth of all Religion, are not they
 the best Friends to Mankind, who teach such a Reli-
 gion, without the least mixture of those arbitrary things,
 that have caus'd such fatal contentions among Chri-
 stians? And which, at the best, serve only to divert
 them from attending to a Religion most worthy of God,
 most friendly to society, most helpful to government, and
 most beneficial to every individual; and which, is a
 Religion, as I hope, is here fully prov'd, founded upon
 such demonstrable principles, as are obvious to the
 meanest capacity, and most effectually prevents the
 growth, both of Scepticism & Enthusiasm.

I intirely agree with this Right Reverend Father,
 that,, Christianity in itself, stripp'd of the additions
 that policy, mistake, & the circumstances of time,
 have made to it, is a most holy Religion;,, but I

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may add, that by reason of these additions, it is become, in most places, a most unholy Religion. And can we hope to get rid of these additions, but by bringing them to the Bishop's own test? I might here ask him, Who are they, that have brought in, & still defend these additions to Christianity; which, as all fair & candid Writers own, have giv'n great advantages to its Adversaries?

What good Christian is not ready to join with the excellent Dr. Sykes, in wishing, * „ That Christians „ would not vend under the name of Evangelical „ Truths, the absurd, and contradictory schemes of „ ignorant, or wicked Men? That they would part „ with the load of rubbish, which makes thinking „ Men sink under the weight, & gives too great a „ handle to Infidelity? † The hands of Friends to „ Christianity, *says he*, have been much embarrass'd, „ thro' fear of speaking against local truths; and its „ Adversaries have so successfully attack'd those „ weaknesses, that Christianity itself has been deem'd „ indefensible; when, in reality, the follies of Christians alone have been so. „ If this be true, have I not shewn some resolution, in daring to attack the darling weaknesses, and follies of false Christians; in proving that true Christianity is so far from being indefensible; that it carries its own evidences with it; or in other words, all its Doctrines plainly speak themselves to be the will of an infinitely wise, & good God; as being *most friendly to society, most helpful to government, & most beneficial to every individual*; or, in one word, free from all Priest-craft.

B. THERE'S one objection which will always stick; you will be represented as an affecter of novelty; & that 'tis pride & vain-glory, which makes you go out of the common road.

* Sykes's Essay on the Truth of the Christ. Relig. p. 224.

† *Ibid.* Preface.

2. THAT is a reflection all must expect, who endeavour to reform any prevailing abuses. They little understand human-nature, who do not see, that novelty, in this case, can only serve to make a Man despis'd by the Majority, for his ignorance, in not being able to discover that truth, which they, at first sight, clearly perceive; as well as hated by them, for propagating false Doctrine, & inhumanly treated for it, if it claims (& where does not Reformation clash) with the interest of a certain set of Men, who have two thirds of Mankind, viz. the *bigots* and *immoral*, intirely at their devotion. But,

I am so far from being a *Novelist*, that all, except where they disagree with themselves, must agree with me. Are not all of my sentiments, who own, that their Revelation contains all things worthy of having God for its Author? For that supposes, that Reason, antecedently to Revelation, can tell them what is, or is not worthy of having God for its Author. And do not all recede from Revelation, or, which is the same, recede from the plain, obvious, grammatical construction of its words, whenever that, in the least point, recedes from the Religion of Nature & Reason? Which being, as Dr. Prideaux *owns*, wrote in the hearts of every one of us from the creation; is * the touchstone of all Religion; & that, if the Gospel varies from it in any particular, or in the minutest circumstance is contrary to its Righteousness, that is strong enough to destroy the whole cause, & make all things else that can be said for its support, totally ineffectual. Which supposes, we can't judge of the truth of any Revelation, till we apply to it the touchstone of all Religion; & see whether it agrees with that in all particulars. And do not all, without regard to the plain meaning of the words, in interpreting the precepts of the Gospel (which are, for the most part, deliver'd in general, undetermin'd, & very

B b 3 often,

* See pag. 51, 52. where the passages are at large.

often, hyperbolical terms) so explain, limit, & restrain these Precepts, as to make them agreeable to the touchstone of all Religion, the Nature, & Reason of Things, for fear, that otherwise they might depreciate morality? And in this case, they, as 'tis allow'd, are the best Interpreters, who most recede from the *killing Letter*. And is not this, in effect, saying with the present Bishop of *Banger*, * „ That the Gospel is a Republication of „ the Law of Nature; & its Precepts declarative of „ that original Religion, which is as old as the Creation. And, „ 'Tis as reasonable to suppose, that three angles „ of a triangle should be equal to two right ones in „ one age, and unequal in another, as to suppose, „ that the duties of Religion should differ in one age, „ from what they were in another, the habitudes, „ and relations from which they flow continuing al- „ ways the same.

THE principles I maintain are so evident, that they who are introducing things in opposition to them, yet must own their force. Dare any say, that God is an arbitrary Being, and his Laws not founded on the eternal Reason of Things; even while they are contending for his acting arbitrarily, and giving us such Laws as are founded on mere will & pleasure? Will any maintain, that our reasoning faculties were not giv'n us, to distinguish between good & evil, Religion and Superstition? Or that they will not answer the end for which they were giv'n?

WILL any affirm, that the nature of God is not eternally the same? Or that the nature of Man is chang'd? Or that the relations God & Man stand in to one another, are not always the same; nay, even while they are making alterations in these relations, by supposing new Laws, & new Duties?

I shall own, that God, at no time, could have any motive to give Laws to Mankind, but for their good; & that he is, at all times, equally good; & at all times,

rest upon the same motives, must they not own with me, except they are inconsistent with themselves; that his Laws, at all times, must be the same? And that the good of Mankind is the test, the criterion, or the internal evidence, by which we are to judge of all his Laws? But,

If, after all, I am still criminal, it must be in not owning, that God created the greatest part of Mankind to be damn'd; or, which is the same, made such things necessary to their salvation, as they were incapable of knowing? And in my asserting, that * *God is a Rewarder of those, who diligently seek him*, tho' they do not seek him under the direction of this, or that set of Men, who, provided they can make themselves necessary here, care not who they damn hereafter. And thus;

In believing with St. Peter, † that *God is no Respecter of Persons, but in every Nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*. And with St. Paul, ‡ that *the Gentiles do by Nature the things contained in the Law*; And that § *God will render to every Man (whether Believer, or Unbeliever) according to his deeds*; And that ¶ *the Grace of God, which bringeth salvation, --- teaching us, --- we shou'd live soberly, righteously, & godly in this present World* (which takes in the whole of our duty) *has appear'd to all Men, and at all times*. And

In believing with our Saviour; that ✕ *the Whole need not a Physician*, and that * *the Doctrine he taught* shows itself to be *the Will of God*, and that he did not *speak of himself*, and in believing the description, that God himself gives of the New Covenant; † *I will put my Laws into their minds; & write them in their hearts: --- They shall not teach every Man his Neighbour. --- They shall all know me from the least to the greatest*.

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* Heb. 11. 6. † Acts 10. 34, 35. ‡ Rom. 2. 14. § 1b. 2. 6.
¶ Tit. 2. 11, 12. ✕ Mat. 9. 12. * John 7. 17.
† Heb. 8. 13. ‡ Ibid. ver. 11.

IN a word, All are forc'd to own these sentiments I contend for, except the *Anthropomorphites*; they, indeed, said, that *Fallible Reason must give place to infallible Revelation*; or in Dr. Wastland's words, *

„ That to advance Natural Light, that is, Pagan „ darkness; in opposition to Scripture evidence, is „ setting up human Conjectures above divine Truths: And that, since the Scripture so frequently imputes human parts, and passions to God, we ought not to doubt of it; only because we can't reconcile it with that Philosophy, which the bulk of Mankind, for whom the Scripture was chiefly wrote, are intirely ignorant of.

IN our next Conference (it being high time to put an end to this) I shall shew you, that all Mankind, *Jews, Gentiles, Mahometans, &c.* agree, in owning the sufficiency of the Law of Nature, to make Men acceptable to God; and that the Primitive Christians believ'd, there was an exact agreement between *Natural & Reveald Religion*; and that the excellency of the latter, did consist in being a Republication of the former.

FOR the present, take these few authorities: „ If, „ says the renowned *Origen*, † „ we admit the judgment „ of God to be just, we must acknowledge, that there „ can be no ground for the punishment of Sinners, „ unless the common conceptions of all Men, are sufficient to give them a sound understanding in the „ duties of Morality: And, therefore, it is not to be „ thought strange, that those things which God has „ taught us by the Prophets, & by our Saviour, were „ implanted by him in the minds of all Men; that so „ every Man, having had the intention, & meaning „ of the Law written in his own heart, shou'd be left „ without excuse before the Divine Tribunal. And,

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* Remarks on Dr. Clark's Exposit. of the Ch. Catechism. p. 66. † *Origen contra Celsum*, l. 1. p. 6.

Laetantius, the most eloquent of the Fathers, seems
 ravish'd with the description *Cicero* gives of the Law
 of Nature; and therefore, chooses to express his own
 sense of it, in the words of that Philosopher. „ The
 „ Law of God, *says he*, * is necessary to be observ'd,
 „ that will lead us into the way of happiness, that
 „ holy & heavenly Law; I mean, which *Marcus Tullius*
 „ has, as it were, divinely describ'd in his third Book
 „ *de Republica*; and whose words, I will, therefore,
 „ subjoin: Right Reason is a Law of Truth, consonant
 „ to Nature, implanted in all Men, uniform & eternal.
 „ — This Law neither needs to be propos'd, nor can
 „ it ever be, either in whole or part, repeal'd, neither
 „ Senate, nor People, can discharge us from the obli-
 „ gation of it, we need not look abroad for an ex-
 „ positor, to make us understand it: It is not one Law
 „ at *Rome*, another at *Athens*; one at this time, another
 „ hereafter; but one, and the same immutable Law
 „ continues, & extends itself to all times & nations;
 „ and one God is the common Lord, & Governor of
 „ all things. — He it is, that has fram'd, propounded,
 „ & establish'd this Law; & whosoever obeys not him,
 „ abandons even himself, renounces his own nature,
 „ & in so doing, suffers actually in himself the greatest
 „ punishment, tho' he escape all things else which
 „ are deem'd so.

St. Austin says, † „ The reason why God has given
 „ us a written Law, is not because his Law was not
 „ already written in our hearts, but because Men let-
 „ ting out their appetites after things abroad, became
 „ strangers to themselves; & therefore, we have been
 „ summon'd, and call'd upon by him, who is every
 „ where present, to return into ourselves: For what
 „ is that the outward written Law calls for, unto
 „ those who have forsaken the Law written in their
 „ hearts; but ‡ *Return, O ye Transgressors, to your*
 „ *own Hearts?*

I shall,

* *L. G. c. 2.* † *In Psal 57.* ‡ *Isaiah 46. 8.*

I shall, likewise, shew you, that the Law of Liberty, that *perfect Law of Liberty*, which we are oblig'd to maintain in all our words & actions; as *† the Law we are to be judg'd by*; does not consist in a freedom from things of a moral nature; for, that wou'd be perfect Slavery; but from all those things, as are not of such a nature: And that 'tis evident from the reasoning, which runs thro' all the Epistles, that the placing Religion in any indifferent things, is inconsistent with the nature of Christianity; 'tis introducing *Judaism*; or what (as Christians have found to their cost) is still more prejudicial.

And therefore, instead of transcribing the best part of the Epistles, I shall only mention a text, or two: The Apostle of the Gentiles not only says, *† Stand fast in the Liberty*; *wherein Christ hath made you free*; but declares, *Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty*; and consequently; that they who impose any indifferent things, as part of Religion, sin against our Christian Liberty, & act by another Spirit than that of the Lord: And I am afraid; that in this, as well as in many other cases, the Spirit of the Lord, & the Spirit of the Church, in most places, have been very opposite. And lest we should mistake, in this important point, the Apostle likewise tells us, not only in what things the Kingdom of God does, but in what things it does not consist: *§ The Kingdom of God is not meat & drink, but righteousness, peace, & joy in the Holy Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, & approv'd of Men: Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, & things wherewith we may edify one another.* If these are the only things, by which we can serve Christ, and which will make us acceptable to God, & approv'd of Men, can such things, as have no tendency to promote righteousness, peace, & joy in the Holy Ghost, make us serviceable to Christ, or acceptable either to God, or Man? THESE

* James 1. 25. † *Ibid.* 2. 25. ‡ 1 Cor. 16. 13.

§ Rom. 14. 17, 18, 19.

THESE words of the Apostle, tho' they need no paraphrase, yet I shall mention what Calvin says on this place; *Nam fieri non potest, ubi quispiam Deo ac-
tius est ac hominibus probatus, quin perselle in ipso vigeat ac
foreat regnum Dei. Qui tranquilla placidaque con-
scientia per justitiam servit. Christo, tam hominibus quam
Deo se approbat. Ubi ergo est justitia, & pax, & gaudium
spirituale, illic regnum Dei suis omnibus numeris est ab-
solutum.* And with him *Eucer, Musculus*; & others of
our first Reformers, agree. And if the Kingdom of God,
which has these things, is absolutely perfect, *omnibus
suis numeris absolutum*, it can only be the Kingdom
of Satan; which requires things of a different nature.
And if 'tis in these things only we can serve Christ,
others can't be introduc'd, but for the service of Anti-
christ.

HOWEVER, I shall, at present, content myself with
saying, There are but two ways for any thing to
oblige; either from the Reason of the thing, or else
from a positive Command. Now, if there are no such
things, as are commanded to be observ'd at all times,
& by all People; & no Commands can oblige those,
to whom they were not giv'n; we have no way left,
to know what things oblige perpetually, but from their
nature; which will sufficiently distinguish them from
those, which (in so miscellaneous a Book as the Bible,
taking in such a vast period of time) might be given
upon certain occasions, & particular reasons; in which
we are no other ways concern'd, than like them, to
act according as the circumstances we are in require.
Without this, Christians wou'd have no certain Rule,
to know what Precepts oblige perpetually; all being
alike commanded in Scripture, without making any
difference; no precepts being said to bind all Mankind,
or to bind any for ever, except those relating to the
Jewish economy; which, in an hundred places, we
are told, are to last for ever.

To comprise the matter in few words, what I have been endeavouring to prove, is,

First, THAT there are things, which, by their internal excellency, shew themselves to be the Will of an infinitely wise, and good God.

Secondly, THERE are things, which have no worth in themselves; yet because those that have, can't many times be perform'd without them, these are to be consider'd as means to an end; & being of a mutable nature, are left to human discretion, to be vary'd as best suits those ends, for whose sake alone they are instituted.

Thirdly, THAT there are some things so indifferent, as not to be consider'd either as means, or ends; & to place any part of Religion in the observance of these, is highly superstitious. And I may venture to say, He that carries these distinctions in his mind, will have a truer notion of Religion, than if he had read all the *Schoolmen*, *Fathers*, and *Councils*.

B. I own, 'tis time to give you some respite, & to thank you for a favour, which can't be too much acknowledg'd; in thus freely communicating your thoughts on this important subject; and doing it after such a manner, as cannot, were this Conference to be publish'd, offend persons; tho' of the greatest gravity, who have the interest of truth at heart.

A. BEFORE we part, I must remind you of the occasion of this Conference; for tho' you plainly saw, that God never intended Mankind shou'd be without Religion; or could ordain an imperfect Religion; and therefore, did not see how to avoid concluding, there must have been, from the beginning, a Religion most perfect, which Mankind, at all times, were capable of knowing: yet you were at a loss, how to make out Christianity to be this perfect, this original Religion. How far I have gone in removing this difficulty, you best know: All I can say, is, I am willing, whenever you please, to resume the conference; & begging leave to repeat what I mention'd at first, am ready to give up my *Hypothesis*, if you can name one attended with fewer difficulties; and likewise, to assure you, that if I have advanc'd any notion, which does not naturally, and necessarily shew itself to be the will of God, by tending to promote his honour, & the Good of Men, I here intirely renounce it: And by not persisting to defend Error; give this uncommon mark of an ingenuous disposition, *Errare possum, Hæreticus esse nolo*.

F I N I S.